THE COMPLETE TERROR ILLUSTRATED ISSUES 1–3

ORIGINAL

EC

PICTO-FICTION

Adult Tales of TERROR

Horror and Suspense

ILLUSTRATED

Introducing...

PICTO-FICTION

a new form of
ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

FOREWORD BY MICK GARRIS

"THE EC ARCHIVES is an ongoing effort to preserve, in a high-quality format, the complete sequential output of what are generally considered to be among the greatest comic books of the twentieth century, those of the Entertaining Comics (EC) group." *—Grant Geissman, from his introduction*

THESE COMICS WERE originally published—on cheap newsprint paper and in limited color—as ten-cent comic books from about 1950 through 1955.

The core editorial staff, including EC publisher Bill Gaines and triple-threat artist/writer/editors Al Feldstein, Johnny Craig, and Harvey Kurtzman, all shared a common passion for creating the best comics they could, rather than simply cranking out hack material. Quite unusual for the time, the EC philosophy was not to pander to their readership. They were among the only companies to allow their artists to sign their work and to draw in their own (not the "house") style. They also presented, in a much more subdued time, tales that dealt with such taboo issues as racial bigotry—illustrated by a roster that now reads like a who's who of mid-twentieth-century comic artists.

This edition of The EC Archives *is* Terror Illustrated, *comprising issues #1–#3 of* Terror Illustrated. *This volume features stories written and illustrated by Johnny Craig, Reed Crandall, Graham Ingels, Joe Orlando, and more!*

ILLUSTRATED TALES DESIGNED TO FRIGHT!

THE EC ARCHIVES

TERROR ILLUSTRATED

ISSUES 1–3

THE COMPLETE SERIES

Foreword by

MICK GARRIS

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This volume collects *Terror Illustrated* #1–#3, originally published between November 1955 and April 1956 by Entertaining Creations, Inc.

Published by Dark Horse Books
A division of Dark Horse Comics LLC
10956 SE Main Street
Milwaukie, OR 97222

DarkHorse.com
Comic Shop Locator Service: comicshoplocator.com

First edition: February 2022
Ebook ISBN 978-1-50671-988-7
Hardcover ISBN 978-1-50671-978-8
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in China

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Crandall, Reed, 1917-1982, artist. | Feldstein, Albert B., writer. | Orlando, Joe, artist. | Evans, George, 1920-2001, artist. | Oleck, Jack, writer. | Ingels, Graham, 1915-1991, artist. | Craig, Johnny, 1926-2001, artist. | Sultan, Charles, 1913-1984, artist. | Davis, Jack, 1924-2016, artist. | Garris, Mick, writer of foreword.
Title: Terror Illustrated / Foreword by Mick Garris.
Description: First edition. | Milwaukie, OR : Dark Horse Books, 2022. | Series: EC Archives | "This volume collects Terror Illustrated #1-#3, originally published between November 1955 and July 1956 by Entertaining Creations, Inc." | Summary: "Enjoy the complete run of Terror Illustrated, an innovative "Picto-Fiction" magazine containing illustrated prose stories of terror, murder, and more of society's supernatural secrets--featuring work by the classic crew of the EC bullpen: Al Feldstein, Jack Davis, Joe Orlando Johnny Craig, and more! Features the never printed third issue and a brand-new foreword by Mick Garris"-- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021037228 (print) | LCCN 2021037229 (ebook) | ISBN 9781506719788 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781506719887 (ebook)
Subjects: LCGFT: Horror comics. | Detective and mystery comics. | Periodicals.
Classification: LCC PN6728.T396 T47 2022 (print) | LCC PN6728.T396 (ebook) | DDC 741.5/973--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021037228
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021037229

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INTRODUCTION

BY GRANT GEISSMAN

The *EC Archives* series is an effort to preserve, in a high-quality format, the complete sequential output of what are generally considered to be among the greatest comic books of the twentieth century, those of the Entertaining Comics group (EC).

EC had a rather modest beginning. The company was begun in 1945 by comics pioneer Maxwell C. Gaines. The letters "EC" originally stood for "Educational Comics," reflecting Gaines's firm belief in the notion of comic books as an educational medium. Back in the 1930s, Gaines had been instrumental in the formation of the early comic book industry. Somewhat later, as publisher of the All-American comics group, he had encouraged his partners at sister company DC/National to release a feature called *Superman*. Max Gaines was later bought out of his share of the All-American and DC/National partnership, and almost immediately he formed EC Comics, taking with him the rights to his *Picture Stories from the Bible* series.

Gaines soldiered on with EC, publishing his ho-hum line for younger readers (including titles like *Tiny Tot Comics* and *Animal Fables*) and the *Picture Stories* series. When Max Gaines was killed in a motorboat accident in August 1947, the company was running about $100,000 in the red. The responsibility for the company fell to his son, William M. Gaines. Bill, who had been studying to be a chemistry teacher, was initially quite reluctant to step into his father's shoes, and he did so only on his mother's insistence. "In the beginning," Bill wrote, "I hated the business so much that I visited the office only once a week to sign the payroll checks." As he began feeling his way through the ins and outs of being a publisher, his attitude began to change. "First thing I knew, I had to read our comics. Next thing I knew, I was in love with them," Bill wrote.

As Bill began to assemble a new and younger staff (notably artist/writers Al Feldstein and Harvey Kurtzman, along with a young artist/writer named Johnny Craig, who had worked for M. C. Gaines), he also began replacing his father's well-intentioned (but lackluster) titles with new (but highly derivative) ones. After several years of playing "follow the leader" and trying to keep up with the ever-changing trends in the comic book industry, Gaines and Feldstein decided to try out some experimental horror stories. (These tryout horror stories were included in the final two issues of their crime titles *War against Crime!* and *Crime Patrol*.) The stories proved to be quite popular, and before long EC's horror comics had become the flagships of the line. This time it was EC's turn to be imitated, and the other companies began to flood the newsstands with competing horror titles.

EC's new line of comics (which Gaines and Feldstein christened "New Trend") consisted not only of horror, but also included science fiction, crime, shock, and—under Harvey Kurtzman's aegis—war and humor comics. (Kurtzman's groundbreaking humor comic, *MAD*, was so successful that Feldstein also produced a sister title for the company, called *PANIC*. This sort of cloning was common practice in the comic book industry.)

Unlike virtually all the other comic book publishers of the time, Gaines and Feldstein strived to produce comics that were several cuts above the standard fare, both in the writing and the artwork. While essentially writing to amuse themselves, they were also targeting an older age group than most other publishers; both men were in their midtwenties at the time. Gaines and Feldstein soon developed a highly effective system, with Gaines generally providing the plot ideas (which he jotted down on little scraps of paper he called "springboards"), and Feldstein fleshing out and writing the stories directly onto the art boards that would be given to the artists to illustrate. Rounding out EC's creative team were artist/writer/editor Harvey Kurtzman, who wrote nearly everything he drew (he also wrote nearly every story in the titles he edited), and Johnny Craig, who generally also wrote the stories he drew.

The list of freelance artists that regularly did work for EC reads like a who's who of comics (and to some extent, magazine illustration) in the mid-twentieth century: Jack Davis, Wallace Wood, Bill Elder, Reed Crandall, Frank Frazetta, Graham Ingels, Al Williamson, Joe Orlando, Jack Kamen, George Evans, Bernie Krigstein, and John Severin. Bill, whose father had always told him that he would never amount to anything, had been able to do what even his father could not do: make EC a success. However, an ominous cloud was on the horizon. Armed with his book *Seduction of the Innocent*, an ambitious psychologist named Dr. Fredric Wertham had begun a highly publicized campaign against horror and crime comics, which eventually led to a full Senate subcommittee investigation of the supposed—but never proven and patently absurd—link between comic books and juvenile delinquency. Forced under pressure to "clean up" his comics or go out of business, Gaines dropped most of his titles, and in 1955 EC began the "New Direction" line of comics. These titles ran into retailer and distributor resistance and were a money-losing proposition. A magazine-sized experiment (dubbed "Picto-Fiction") was also attempted; this too proved unsuccessful.

Fortunately for Bill Gaines, he still had *MAD* in his back pocket, which he had recently turned into a magazine format to mollify creator/writer Harvey Kurtzman. Gaines put all his eggs in the *MAD* basket, and insanity (though some would say inanity!) prevailed. After Kurtzman's departure from *MAD* in 1956, Gaines enlisted Al Feldstein as the magazine's editor (a position he held until his retirement in 1985). *MAD* magazine became, of course, an American icon. The EC comics, however, were no more.

Gone but not forgotten, EC has a flame that its most ardent fans have kept burning brightly over the many years. And as a result, the EC magic can still be enjoyed not only by its original devotees, but also by successive (and equally rabid) generations of EC Fan-Addicts. Like you!

FOREWORD

BY MICK GARRIS

"A new form of adult entertainment!"

When I was a boy, my greatest dream was to become a cartoonist. I grew up on cartoons and comic books and monster movies. My father was a talented and schooled artist who studied at an art college in Los Angeles well before I was born. He'd created a couple of strips and had even made a deal with King Features to create what would now be called a graphic novel about Native Americans.

Unfortunately, Dad was now raising four kids in LA's San Fernando Valley, working as a technical engineering draftsman at Lockheed during the day and driving a cab by night to feed his family. The workload became too much for him, and he had a breakdown that led him to give up his dream as an artist, despite his talent and exceptional abilities, and get a real job. Though we drew together for a while for fun during my Wonder Years, he never painted or drew seriously again.

I had inherited a smidgen of my father's artistic abilities, and it was my dream to make animated cartoons and comic books. Though I was way too young to have been exposed to EC comics when they were published, I was not too young to have read about them in the pages of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* and other monster kid publications.

It was years before I finally got my hands on some of the disintegrating copies of the books themselves, and it wasn't until Russ Cochran started reprinting the EC stories and comics that I actually got to see the work as it was intended, and it exceeded all expectations.

The ever-adventurous folks at Entertaining Comics, meaning primarily publisher William Gaines and editor Al Feldstein, had produced army comics, western comics, murder mysteries, romances, and the like, but of course, it was horror that became their raison d'être . . . and the reason we still know of them today.

Though the stories were grisly and bombastic, it was mostly young people who devoured those monstrous gems . . . infamously leading Dr. Fredric Wertham to publish, in 1954, the wildly hysterical *Seduction of the Innocent*, all about how comics lead young people down the path to ruin, and eventually resulting in the dreaded Comics Code.

But in 1955 and 1956, EC tried their hand at a different kind of comic book, aimed exclusively at an adult audience. There were no word bubbles here: what they

calle "Picto-Fiction" was ornately illustrated short stories in text form. *Shock Illustrated* and *Terror Illustrated* were both short-lived attempts to expand EC's readership beyond the innocent and rope in people who shaved.

Though the format was quite different, the talent was very much the same as you'd find in *Tales from the Crypt* and *Vault of Horror*: editor Al Feldstein wrote almost all of the stories, under his own name, as well as under the noms de plume of Maxwell Williams and, yes, the soon to be EC superstar Alfred E. Neuman.

It was a fascinating venture, but did not really pay the hoped-for adult dividend. Even though the covers proclaimed, "Picto-Fiction, a new form of Adult Entertainment," the book only lasted two issues.

But what issues! These tales of horror and suspense may well have often recycled some of Uncle Al's previous stories for the other books, but they were told in prose just as purple and aimed more at dads than sons. The covers for both issues of *Terror Illustrated* (bannered officially on the cover of the books as "Adult Tales of TERROR, Horror, and Suspense, ILLUSTRATED") were done by Reed Crandall, and the artists who handled the story illustrations were the stars of horror comics as well: Crandall, Joe Orlando (whom my father's style seems most to have resembled), George Evans, "Ghastly" Graham Ingels (working here without the "Ghastly" moniker), Charles Sultan, and the ever-popular Jack Davis.

It was a noble experiment, but not enough to take it past those two rare issues. The Picto-Fiction comics experiment never caught on, and lost money throughout their short lives. There was to be a third issue of *Terror Illustrated*, but it was never published, due to the sudden bankruptcy of EC's distributor, though it was eventually a part of Russ Cochran's mammoth *Complete EC Library* reprint.

But now, thanks to Dark Horse, we are able to see these rare and unique experiments in the EC Picto-Fiction lab in a shape and form even better than their original publication.

Mick Garris
7 August 2021

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No. 1

AN ORIGINAL EC PICTO-FICTION MAGAZINE

Adult Tales of TERROR

Horror and Suspense

ILLUSTRATED

Introducing...

PICTO-FICTION

a new form of
ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

AN ENTERTAINING EC CREATION

No. 1

TERROR ILLUSTRATED

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"Adult Tales of TERROR Illustrated" is the third in a new series of magazines to present a novel and revolutionary development in the art of story-telling. We at E.C. call this new form of adult entertainment "Picto-Fiction." *Picto-Fiction* is a careful combination of two arts: the art of writing, and the art of illustration.

We deliberately label *Picto-Fiction* "adult" entertainment because it is designed to be just that . . . entertainment for the more mature fiction reader.

In "Adult Tales of TERROR Illustrated," Picto-Fiction enters into the spine-tingling world of horror literature, and brings to the adult reader stories of the weird, the uncanny, the supernatural, and the macabre. In short, Picto-Fiction intends to scare the wits out of you!

Future issues will include a "Readers' Page" made up of your comments, so we invite mail. The address is:

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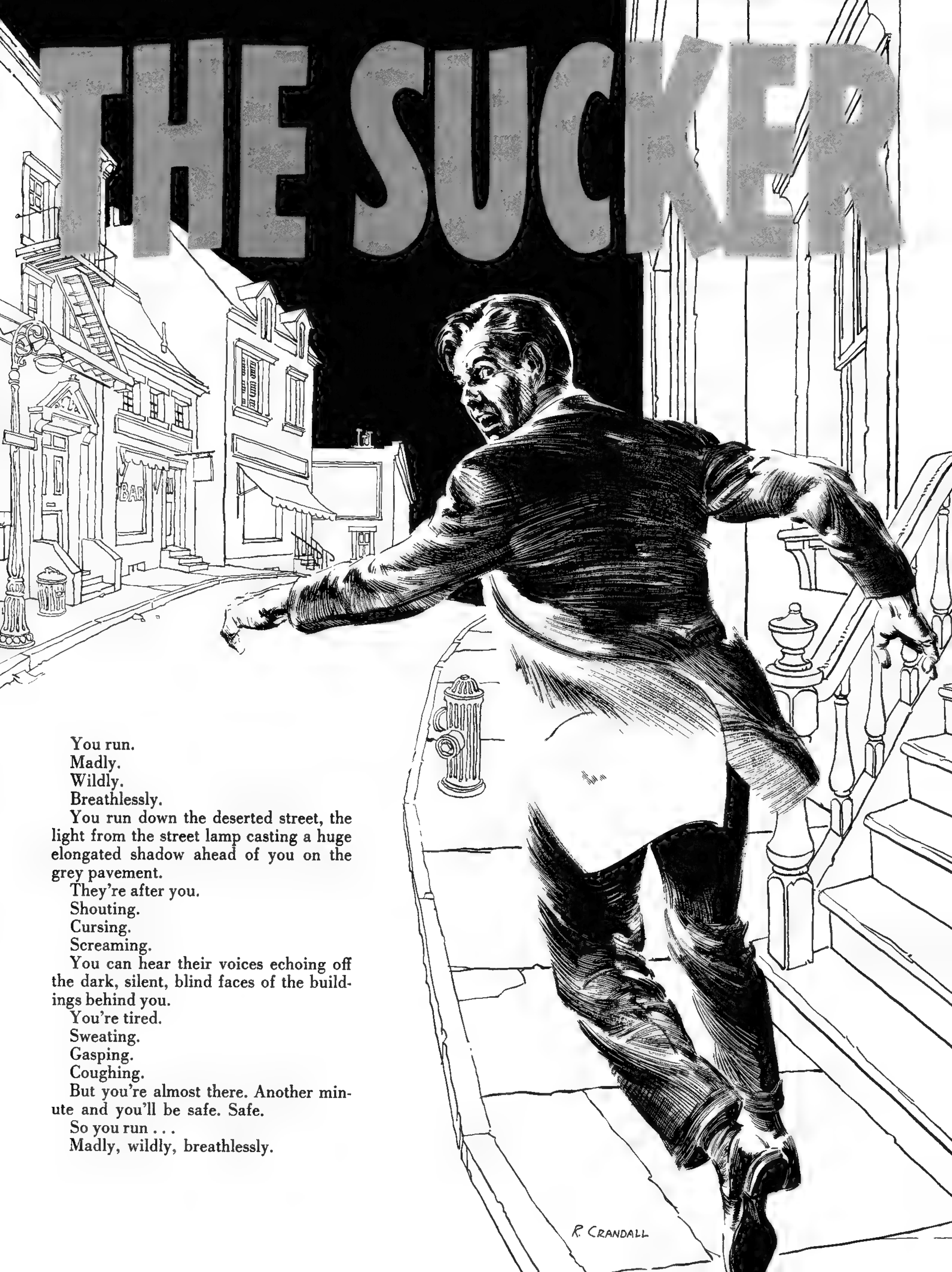
Terror Illustrated, November-December, Vol. 1, No. 1. Published Bi-Monthly by I. C. Publishing Co., Inc., at 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N. Y. Application as second class matter pending at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Subscriptions, 12 issues for $3.00 in the U. S. Elsewhere, $3.75.
Entire contents Copyrighted 1955 by I. C. Publishing Co., Inc. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped return envelope. No similarity between any of the characters and names of persons appearing in this magazine and those living or dead is intended, and any such similarity is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

THE SUCKER



You run.

Madly.

Wildly.

Breathlessly.

You run down the deserted street, the light from the street lamp casting a huge elongated shadow ahead of you on the grey pavement.

They're after you.

Shouting.

Cursing.

Screaming.

You can hear their voices echoing off the dark, silent, blind faces of the buildings behind you.

You're tired.

Sweating.

Gasping.

Coughing.

But you're almost there. Another minute and you'll be safe. Safe.

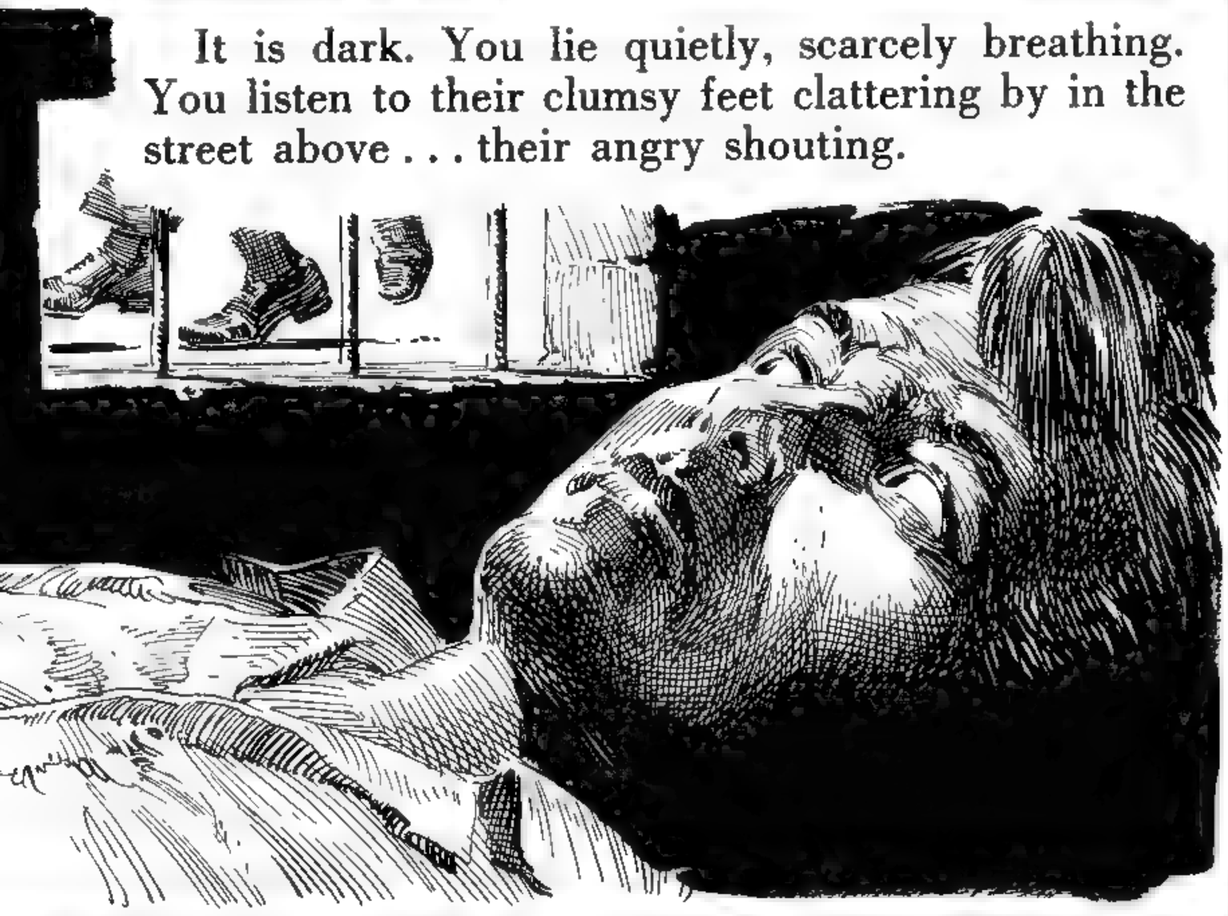
So you run . . .

Madly, wildly, breathlessly.

The heavy clattering footsteps behind you are closer, now, as you turn the corner . . . the familiar corner. One more block. Just one more.

And then you're there, hurling yourself down the stone steps . . . the steps you've come down so many times before . . . the steps to your basement home.

It is dark. You lie quietly, scarcely breathing. You listen to their clumsy feet clattering by in the street above . . . their angry shouting.



Your fear subsides. You feel warm now. Safe. You're home. Back where you belong. They can't harm you here. You listen to their voices drifting off into the night.

"He's turned in somewhere!"

"We'll find him! We'll get him!"

"The fiend!"

You relax. You stretch out comfortably and sigh. A million thoughts race through your mind. A million thoughts race back . . . back to the beginning.

You'd gotten off the train from Chicago with money in your pocket. A lot of money. Blood money. Money you'd stolen. Money you'd killed for.

You'd run then too. From the little store you'd held up. From the stupid proprietor who'd tried to stop you until you'd pumped three bullets into his twitching body. You'd run then too.

You'd run back to your cheap hotel room, packed hastily, and caught a train. Into the night. Into obscurity. Until you'd come to this quiet city, far from your crime. And you'd gotten off the train.

You'd met her then. You'd stood on the deserted station platform, watching the train pull away, and she'd been there, smiling at you.

She'd stood beneath the light of the lamp, and her eyes had flashed with a strange, mysterious fire. You'd moved toward her, as if drawn by some invisible thread. "Excuse me," you'd said. "I'm a stranger in town. I just got in. I was wondering . . ."

"I know," she'd smiled. "I saw you get off the train. You'll be looking for a place to stay."

She'd been beautiful. Yes, you remember that. She'd looked into your eyes and your heart had pounded in your chest. Her lips had been full and red. Inviting. When she'd spoken, they'd touched, clinging for a moment, as if reluctant to part once more. You'd suddenly longed to taste those lips.

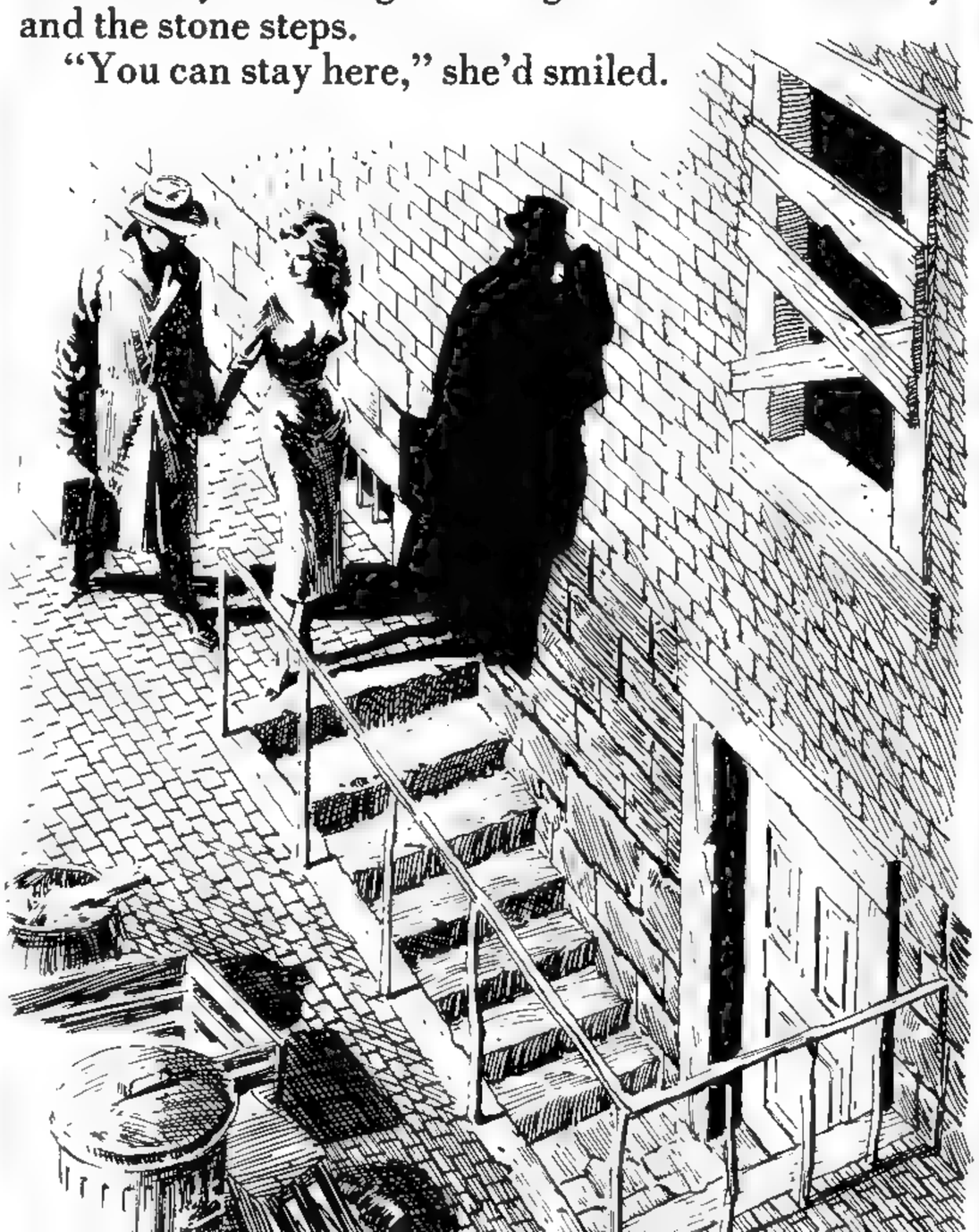
"Well, as a matter of fact, I do need a room!" you'd said, your imagination running wild.

She'd taken you by the hand, her jet black hair shimmering as the night breeze gently caressed it.

"Come with me," she'd whispered.

You couldn't resist her. Just the sight of her had kindled a fire within you. You'd gone with her, and she'd led you through the night streets to the alley and the stone steps.

"You can stay here," she'd smiled.



You lie there, with a million thoughts racing through your mind. You lie there, remembering. But you can't seem to remember clearly. The memory is hazy now. You'd objected as she'd unlocked the door. You know that. "But, I can't move in on you," you'd said, not wanting to impose.

"I'll be leaving tomorrow night. This will be your place after I'm gone." She'd stepped inside.

And then she'd closed the door and pressed close to you . . . her full red lips so near . . . so near . . .

You remember that. You remember her coming close to you . . . her soft mouth quivering. But the memory fades out there. The rest is blank. There are so many places afterwards that are blank. The pauses . . . the dark, empty places in your line of thought begin there . . . with her coming close to you.

What happened? What came after? You cannot remember. The rest of that night and the whole next day are lost to you, like some forgotten melody.

The next thing you can recall is the following night. You'd been asleep. You can remember awakening . . . opening your eyes . . . and seeing her there, in the shadows, her eyes shining with that strange fire.

And you can remember how weak you'd felt. How you'd tried to rise. How she'd come to you, out of the shadows, and whispered:

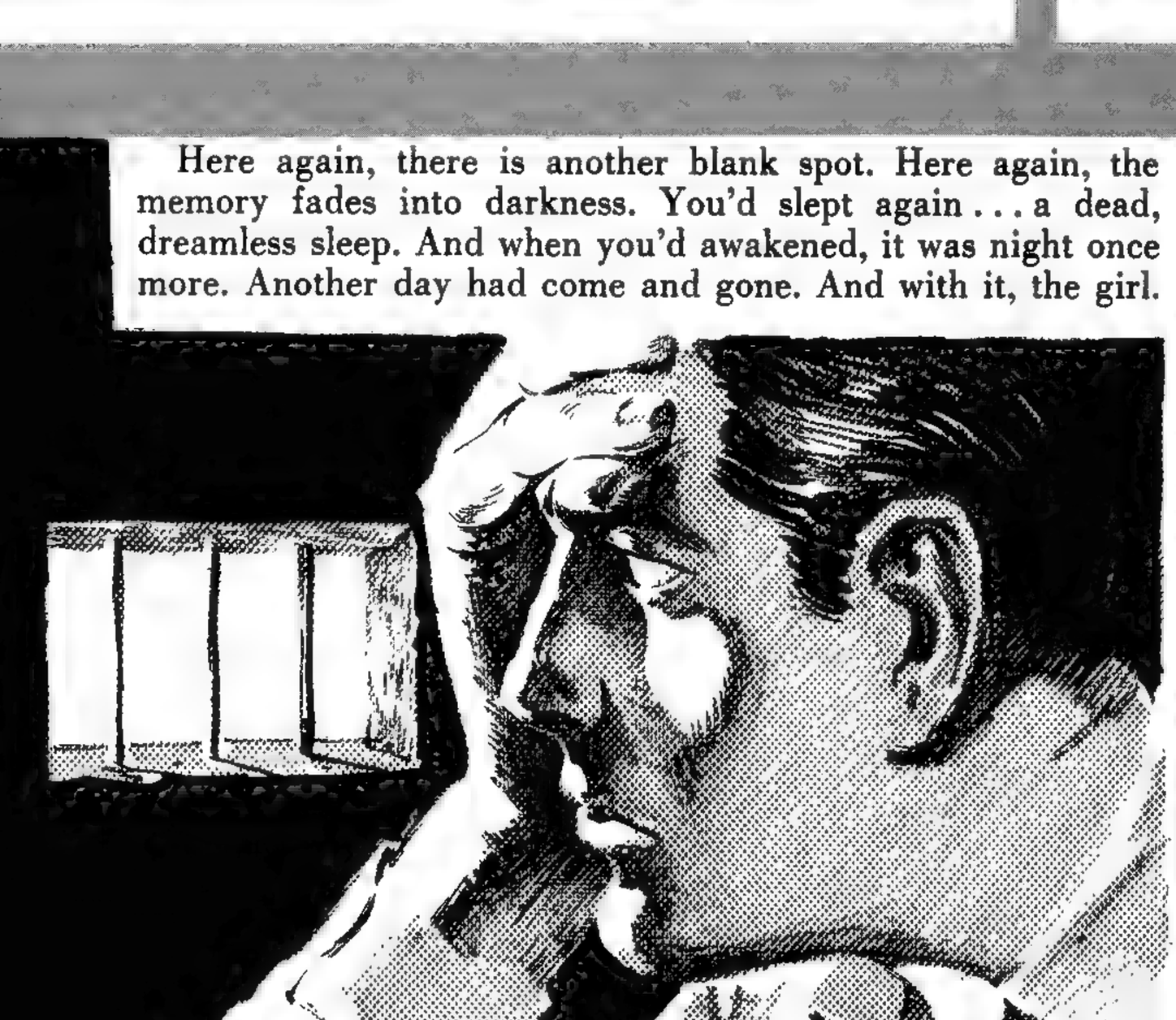
"I stayed. I stayed an extra day. For you. I could not leave. Not yet . . ."

And you remember how she'd bent close to you, again, like that first night, her full red lips so near. And how she'd touched your eyelids gently closed, saying softly, "Sleep! Sleep, my dearest!"

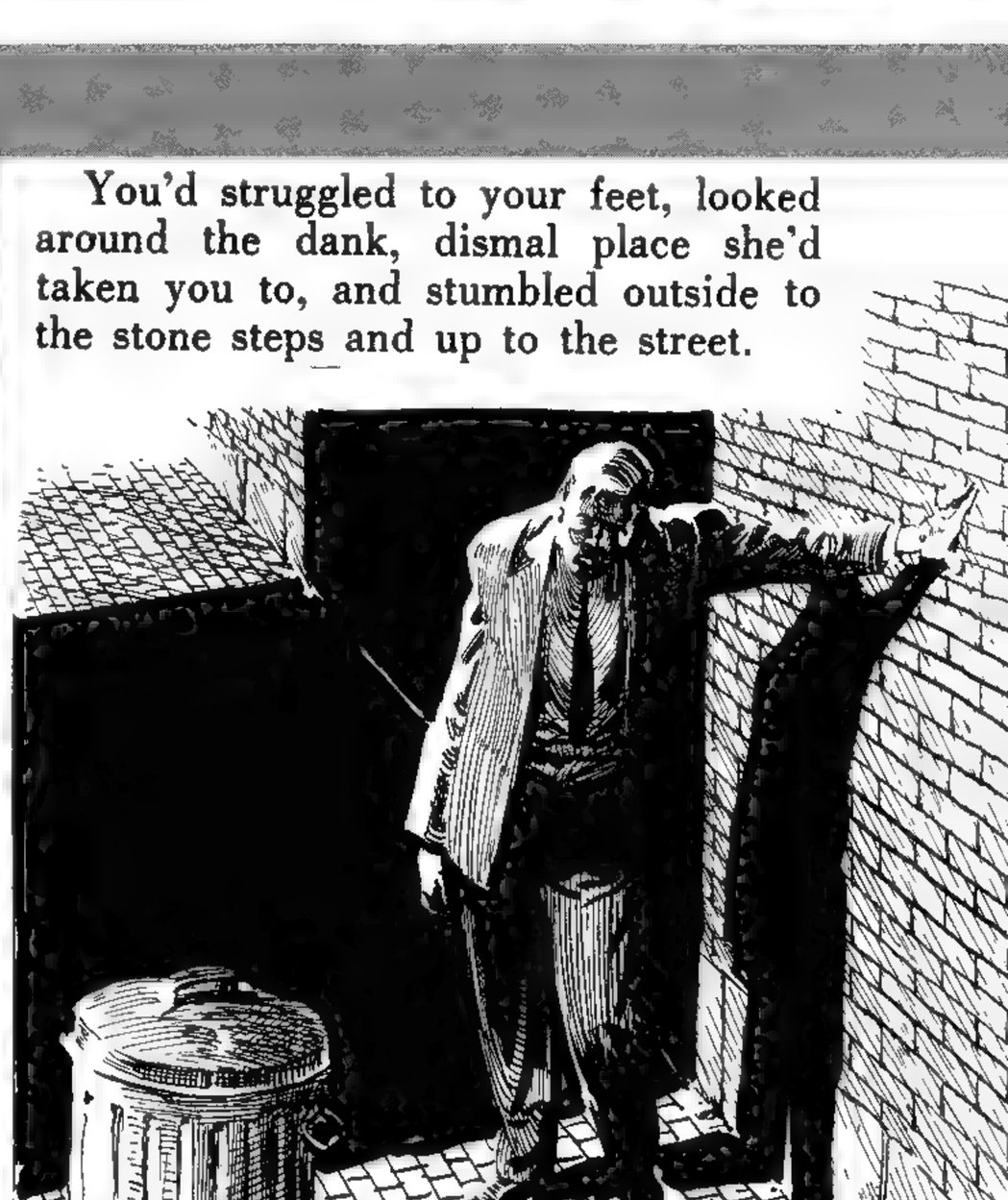
"Tomorrow, you will feel strong. Tomorrow you will be ready. As for now . . . sleep . . . sleep . . ."

And you'd felt her warm breath upon your neck and the touch of those soft red lips.

Here again, there is another blank spot. Here again, the memory fades into darkness. You'd slept again . . . a dead, dreamless sleep. And when you'd awakened, it was night once more. Another day had come and gone. And with it, the girl.



You'd struggled to your feet, looked around the dank, dismal place she'd taken you to, and stumbled outside to the stone steps and up to the street.



Two whole days! For two whole days, you'd slept! What had she done to you? What was that strange weariness you'd felt? That hunger? That craving? You'd had to find her. So you'd begun to search.

You'd searched everywhere. In bars, back rooms, nightclubs, juke-box joints. You'd combed the city.

"Naah, I ain't seen any broad fittin' *that* description, but I'd sure like to!" they'd said.

You'd thanked them and gone on. On. And a hatred had grown within you. As the night dragged by, it had infected, festered. She'd drugged you! Robbed you! Suddenly, you hated her. Hated her! And then you'd seen her, moving up the deserted street.

You'd run to her, hot with the rage you felt. And that other feeling was strong within you, too. That craving . . . that hunger for something . . .

She'd turned to you as you'd approached. And a look of fear had blanched her face. Then . . . then . . .

You try to remember. You lie in the darkness and try to remember what happened next. What you did to her. Only, you can't remember. Here, there is another blank spot. They become more frequent, now. Gaps in your memory chain. Voids in the past recalled. Empty places.

Had she screamed? You seem to recall an echoing shriek. Or had it been your own shriek of anger?

She'd fallen to the pavement. You know that. Because the next thing you remember is standing over her, looking down at her still, white face.

Only, somehow, her face had changed. She was no longer the girl you were searching for. And the hunger was gone too. The craving had disappeared.

You'd looked down at this stranger, and you'd felt sick and ashamed. You'd killed the wrong girl.

You'd run then, terrified. You'd run until you could run no more. You were tired, and gasping for breath when you saw them. The stone steps. Leading down to the place where you'd slept the day before.

You remember the sky getting light with the coming of the dawn. You remember the weariness that engulfed you. You remember stumbling down those inviting stone steps . . .

And then there is another blank spot . . . another gap in your memory.

Perhaps you slept again. Perhaps not. You cannot recall. The darkness fades, and the next thing you remember is the flashing lights of the theatre marquee. It was night again and you'd been walking the streets. The rage had been strong. And the hunger had returned. You'd thought:

"Perhaps a movie will help me take my mind off her. I haven't seen a movie in a long time."

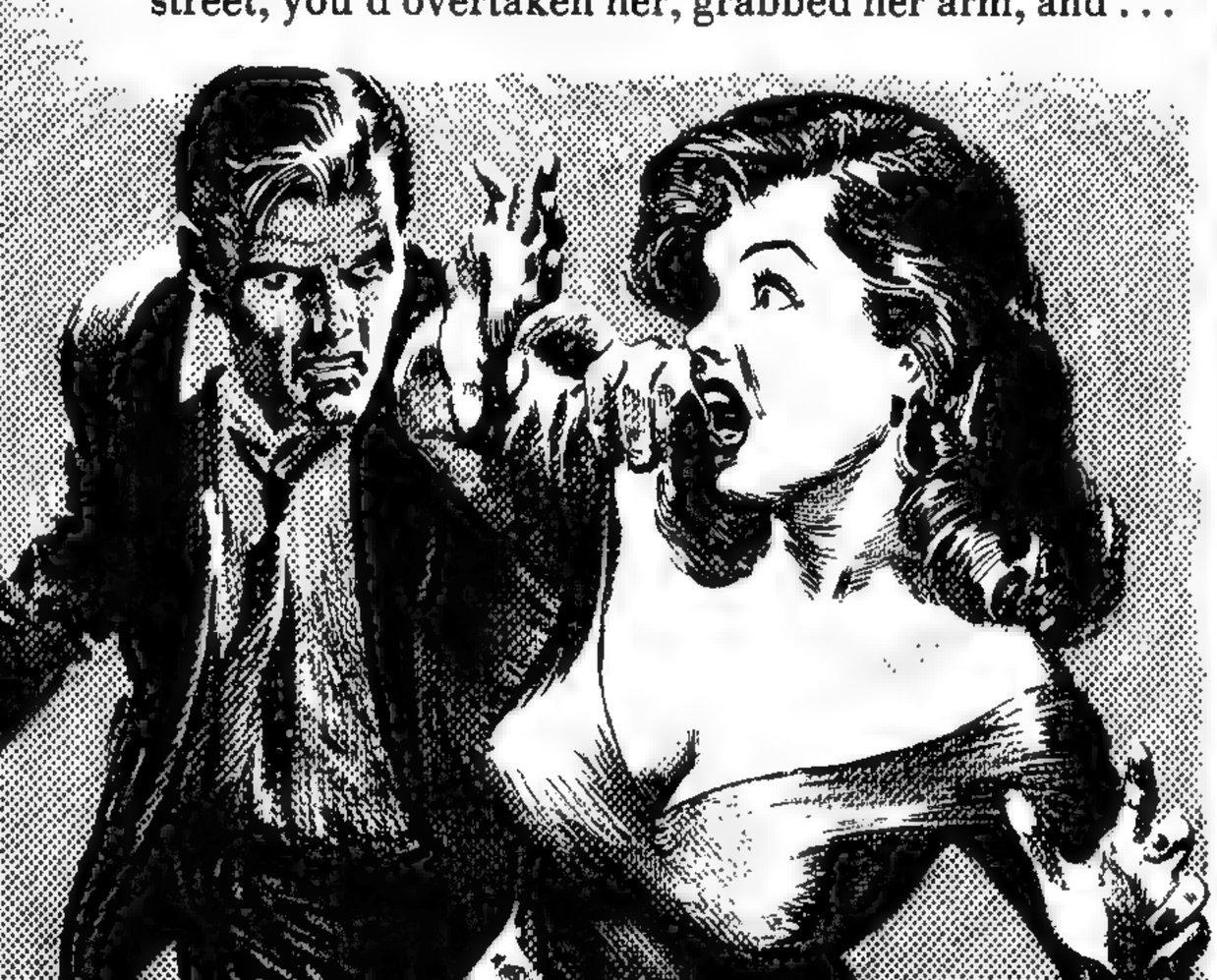
So you'd crossed to the box office and stood in line and reached into your pocket.

You'd forgotten! She'd taken your money. You didn't have a cent! That girl . . .

You'd stood there, frustrated and angry, until they'd made you step out of line. And then, you'd seen her! That girl! Yes! She was coming out of the movie! *She'd* seen the picture! With *your money!*

You'd trailed her. The rage within you was a roaring storm. And the craving . . . the hunger . . .

When she finally turned into a quiet, deserted street, you'd overtaken her, grabbed her arm, and . . .



Another blank space. Another piece missing from the puzzle of your past. You lie there, listening, trying to remember. And you remember nothing except standing over her, and seeing her chalk-white face.

You remember standing over her. Not angry any more. Not craving any more. Just tired. Tired. And seeing that face. That chalk-white stranger's face. And crying out in dismay:

"Oh, God! I've made another mistake! This isn't her! This isn't the girl I'm looking for!"

Yes, you can remember that. You can remember, as you lie there safe in the darkness, how you'd knelt, and realized that she was dead, and become panicky as a car turned into the street, casting its headlight glare on the still form lying in the gutter. Yes, you can remember how you'd fled into a black alley. How you'd run. And how you'd thought as you'd run through the night:

"I'm a murderer! She's done something to me! She's driven me out of my mind! She's made me a murderer! She's done this thing to me! That girl! But, I'll find her! I'll find her!"

You'd run. Until there was no more strength in your legs. Until your heart pounded and your brain throbbed. Until the coming dawn streaked the night sky. Until you were there . . . at the steps once more.

Another void. Another span of darkness. It was night once more when you climbed to the street and heard the newsboy's cry:

"Extra! Extra! Read all about the murders!"

You remember how you'd gone to him, and stuttered an excuse about forgetting your wallet . . . promising to pay him back. And how the boy had looked at you with contempt and handed you a paper.

"TWO WOMEN FOUND MURDERED," the headlines had screamed. "Two unexplained deaths on two successive nights have the police of this city baffled and the populace terrorized," the article had gone on. "The causes of death have, as yet, been undetermined, but it is believed that a dangerous maniac is stalking the street. Citizens are warned to stay indoors and avoid walking the streets at night. A twenty-four hour police . . ."

You'd crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it from you, cursing.

And once again, you'd stalked the city, looking for her . . . your anger, your hunger, your craving stronger than ever. And then, you'd seen her. Only this time, you'd made sure. You'd crept up behind her and clapped your hand over her mouth and looked into her wide screaming eyes. You'd looked carefully as your brain reeled. This time it *was* her! This time there was no mistake! Yes. Yes . . .

You lie in the darkness and remember. That was last night. That was when you realized that they *all* looked like her to you *before*. But *after* . . .

And tonight. You remember tonight. You remember stumbling once again up the stone steps and going in search of her through the night streets. And coming to the crowd gathered in front of the radio store, listening to the latest bulletins rasping from the round, expressionless face of the speaker over the doorway:

Another blank. Another lapse. You remember only that the storm had broken, that the rage had run wild, and that the craving had subsided. When it was over, when she lay on the grass with her pale face turned up to you and you'd wiped your moist lips and looked down at her, you'd seen to your horror that once again you'd erred. Once again you'd made an awful mistake. Once again, you'd killed the wrong woman!

". . . last night the killer's third victim was found in an empty lot in the same general area where the previous two bodies were discovered. An autopsy revealed that she, too, had met her death in the same manner as the two young women before her. The theory has been advanced that this is the work of . . ."

You'd looked around as the voice from the loudspeaker rambled on about the murderer. You'd studied the faces. The morbidly fascinated faces.

And then you'd seen her.

You'd hidden behind a fat man and waited. This time it *was* her. It was!

". . . Doctor Alex Farnsworth has declared that there is no foundation to this theory, however. That such creatures belong in the realm of superstition and fantasy and do not exist . . ." the voice from the loudspeaker had droned on.

She'd listened intently to the gory details, and you'd waited. Finally, she'd turned, pushed gently through the crowd, and walked away. You'd followed.

She'd walked quickly, frightened by what she'd heard on the radio. You'd crept along behind her, hugging the shadows. You'd suddenly felt a faint suspicion that after it would be over . . . after the rage had subsided and the strange craving had been satisfied . . . that she'd be someone else! That she wouldn't be that girl at all!

Yet you'd followed her. You'd had to!

And when she'd turned into that empty street, you'd closed in. But you were clumsy. You'd made noise. She'd spun around, saw you, and screamed.

They'd heard her screams. They'd come running. The crowd from the radio store. You'd had to escape. And so you'd run, madly, wildly, breathlessly.

You'd run back to your stone steps . . . to your resting place.

Now, you lie in the dark and there is no more remembering. Except for what the voice over the loudspeaker had blared . . . about the victim's blood being drained from their bodies!

"The work of a vampire," it had said.

You sit up, suddenly. You gaze around your dank dismal resting place. The place she'd taken you to. A vampire? Is that what you are?

The light of dawn is just beginning to grope through the window above you. It fills the room with an eerie greyness. You look down at the oblong box you've been lying in. The coffin.

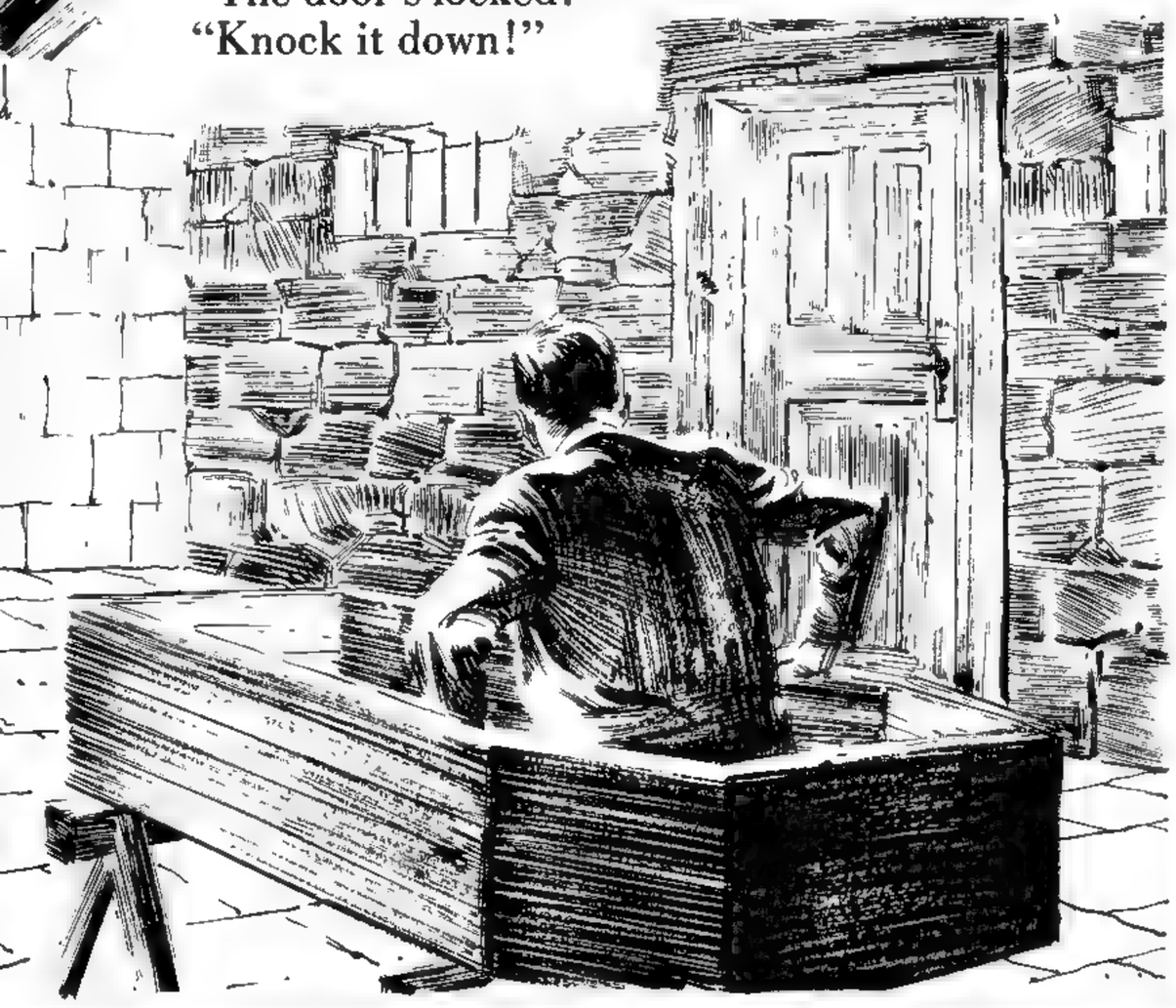
It's true, then! You *are* a vampire! She made you one! That girl! She took you here and made you a member of the living dead, like her. She made you a thing that sleeps by day in a coffin, and stalks its victims by night, driven by an insatiable craving for blood. Warm human blood.

You try to rise. There are heavy footfalls on the stone steps outside.

"What about this place? We didn't search here!"

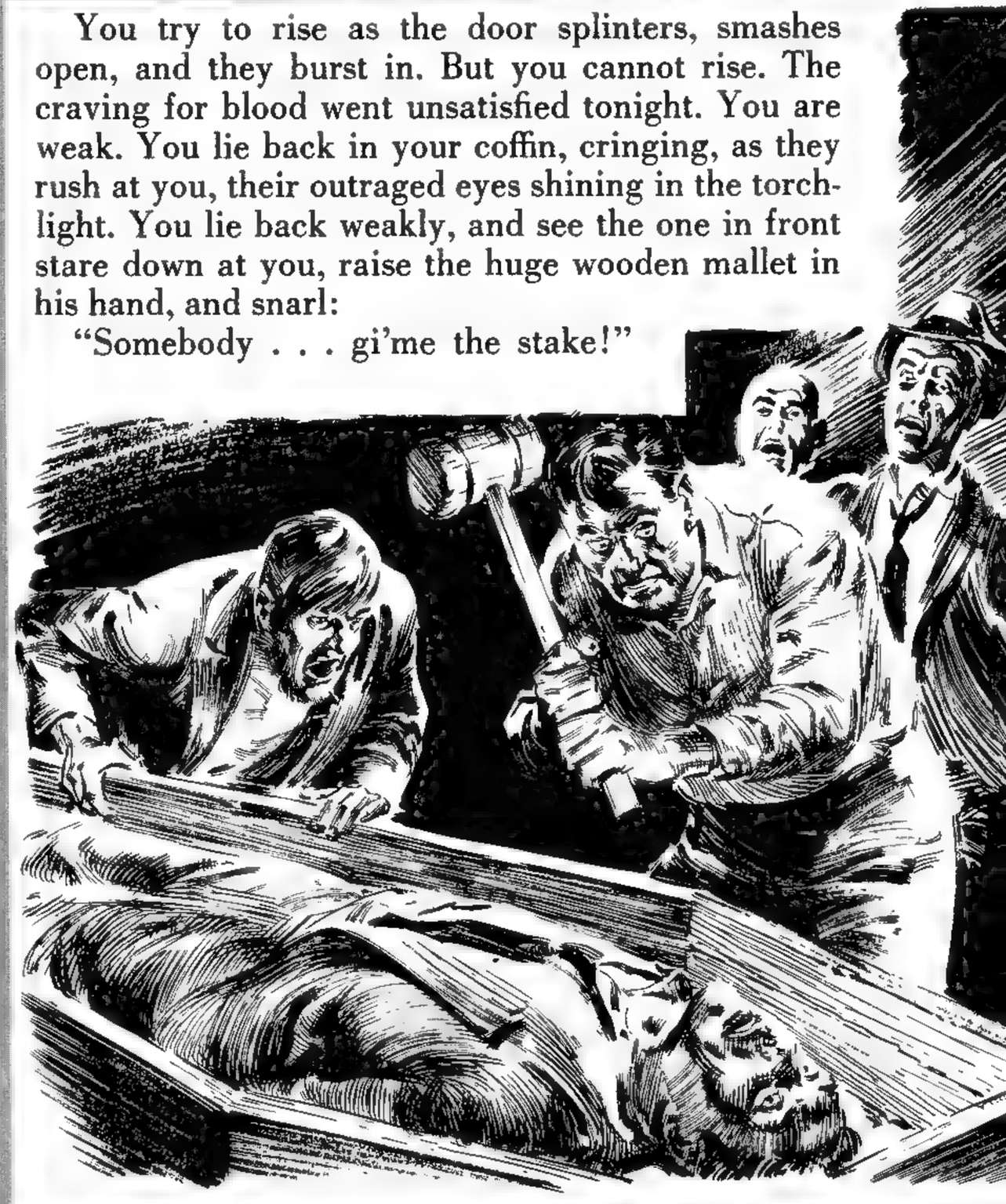
"The door's locked!"

"Knock it down!"



You try to rise as the door splinters, smashes open, and they burst in. But you cannot rise. The craving for blood went unsatisfied tonight. You are weak. You lie back in your coffin, cringing, as they rush at you, their outraged eyes shining in the torchlight. You lie back weakly, and see the one in front stare down at you, raise the huge wooden mallet in his hand, and snarl:

"Somebody . . . gi'me the stake!"



You watch, horrified, as the one in front leans over you. You watch, too weak to push the stake aside, as he places its crudely whittled point to your chest. You watch as he raises the mallet high. And as he brings it down, you scream. Again and again, as the mallet falls, you scream.

You'll remember the end . . . the tearing of flesh, the crunching of bone, the excruciating pain as the stake digs into your throbbing heart. You'll remember it all. And lastly, you'll remember her. There. In the crowd. Smiling down at you. Then laughing. Laughing! And her laughter will follow you into eternity.

THE END

SURE-FIRE SCHEME

Tim Haley lay on the bunk of his cage-like cell in the prison's Death-Row. There was no responsive thud in the doctor's ears when he placed his stethoscope to Haley's chest. His heart had stopped. For a moment, it seemed that everything had stopped. Every sound, every motion seemed to hesitate. Death Row was always silent, but now even that silence seemed intensified.

When the doctor spoke, his voice was sudden, startling.

"This man is dead," he said quietly.

"So . . . he kept his word." The warden shook his head in wonderment. "He said we'd never execute him. Thanks, Doc."

"No trouble, Warden. I'd have had to check him over after the execution in any case." The doctor, too, shook his head wonderingly.

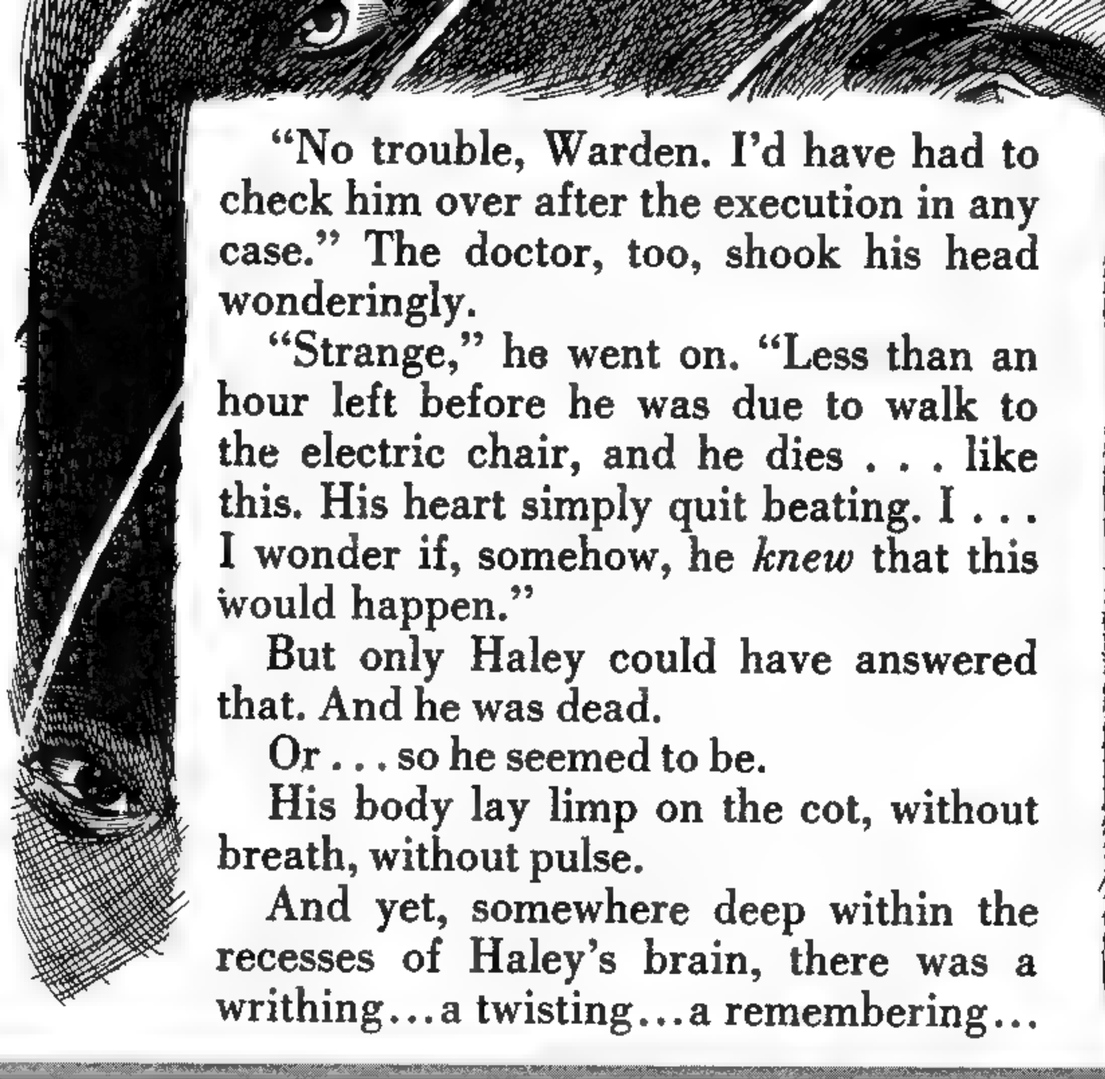
"Strange," he went on. "Less than an hour left before he was due to walk to the electric chair, and he dies . . . like this. His heart simply quit beating. I . . . I wonder if, somehow, he *knew* that this would happen."

But only Haley could have answered that. And he was dead.

Or . . . so he seemed to be.

His body lay limp on the cot, without breath, without pulse.

And yet, somewhere deep within the recesses of Haley's brain, there was a writhing...a twisting...a remembering...



Haley was angry. The carnival had buttoned up for the night hours ago. Along the deserted midway, only an occasional bit of paper skidded before the wet wind, past the darkened tents. It was almost two in the morning and Rosa had not come. And now, the night was turning raw, the dampness was sweeping through the loud cheap suit which was the badge of Haley's profession. Haley was a barker, with all of a barker's brashness and self-assurance. But here, without an audience, he seemed just what he really was: a small man with a hairline moustache whose chief talent was an ability to exploit the inarticulate yearnings of certain type women . . . like Rosa.

She came hurrying down the midway now, staying in the shadows, to where he waited. A young woman, inclined to plumpness, with a pink farmgirl complexion. She'd been a farmgirl, once . . . until the carny had passed through her home town and its false glitter had pulled her along in its wake.

Now, Rosa was Hank Price's wife. Hank owned the carny's food concession. He was past fifty. But he had money in the bank, a prosperous concession, and Rosa.

Rosa came into Haley's arms without preamble. She huddled there, her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, Tim, Tim, I was so afraid you'd be gone when I got here. I thought Hank would never fall asleep. You're . . . you're not angry with me?"

"With you?" Haley said it warmly, trying to hide the fact that he was sick to death of her. He smiled, held her tighter. "Baby doll, you know better than that. I'm crazy about you, you could never do anything to make me sore."

He thought about his plan.

How would she take it? Haley wondered. His plan was foolproof. He was certain of that. But he'd need Rosa's help. Well . . . there was just one way to find out.

"I'm not sore, sweetheart," he began. "But, Rosa, how long can we keep this up? It's driving me crazy! Meeting secretly. Stealing these moments. If only we could be together always. If only we could get married."

"Oh, Tim, if only we could. But Hank would never let me go. You know how he is." Rosa sighed.

He had expected Rosa to recoil. And he was ready for it. When she drew away, he held her, he whispered to her. And gradually, the horror in her face lessened. In the end, he laughed it off . . . said that he had not meant it. But the seed had been planted. He told her no more, nothing about his plans.

Now, there was the second step. In the morning, Haley went to see Krishna.

"Yeah," Tim spat. "I know. He's mean and rich. He's got everything and I've got nothing." He turned away. "But it doesn't have to be like that!"

"It doesn't?" Rosa's voice was like that of an innocent child. When Haley turned back, his eyes were like marbles. But Rosa did not notice.

"No. It doesn't. If Hank were . . . dead, we'd be all set, wouldn't we? We'd have his money . . . his concession . . . and you'd have me. All legal!"

Midway down the carny's main avenue, there was a garish banner loudly proclaiming Krishna's talents: KRISHNA, THE ONE, THE ONLY MYSTIC OF THE EAST! SEE HIM BURIED ALIVE! Krishna did a suspended animation act, and Haley had been cultivating him for weeks.

"So you really meant it when you said you'd show up today." The Hindu was a true Indian, from Nepal, but twenty years of carnys had given him the accent of the roustabout.

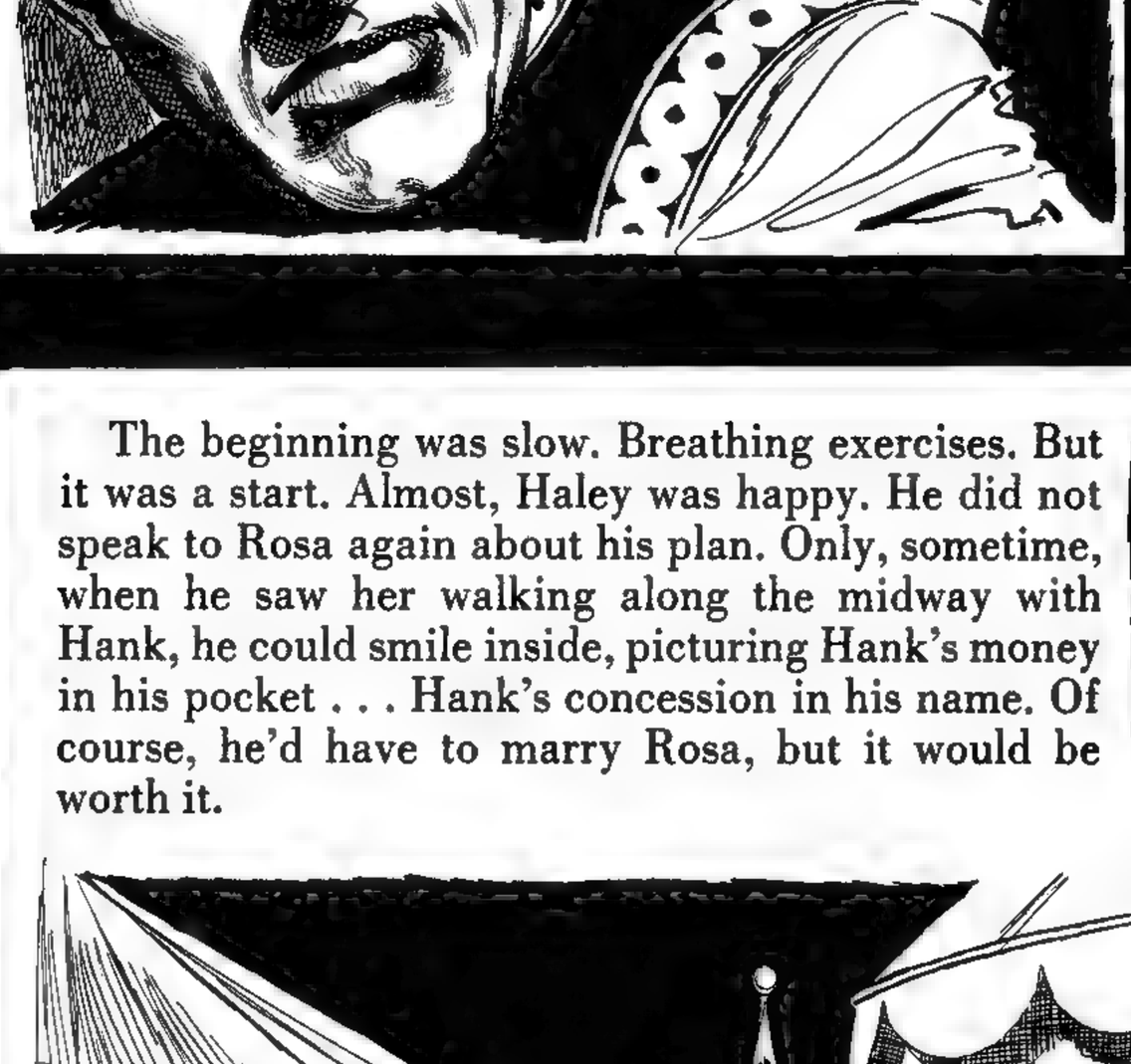
"You really want to learn my suspended animation act, eh?" he smiled.

"I said I did." Haley made his voice ernest. "Krishna, you know how I feel. What am I? A barker. A nothing. If I had an act of my own, I'd be somebody. You promised."

"I'll be able to do it," said Haley. "I've got a reason."

"Okay." The Hindu was not enthusiastic, but he'd lived a long time with carny people. He could recognize a driving ambition when he saw it. "We'll start now."

"Sure, I promised. I said I'd teach you." The Hindu shrugged. "But that was over a bottle. Haley, look. Why pick my kind of act? You'd have to work hard, learn to control your breathing, your muscles. It's rough! And maybe after a year you still won't be able to do it!"



The beginning was slow. Breathing exercises. But it was a start. Almost, Haley was happy. He did not speak to Rosa again about his plan. Only, sometime, when he saw her walking along the midway with Hank, he could smile inside, picturing Hank's money in his pocket . . . Hank's concession in his name. Of course, he'd have to marry Rosa, but it would be worth it.

It took a year. A year of hard work, of learning to concentrate until his brain ached. But Haley did it.

There was a time, at last, when his body lay on the cot in Krishna's tent and it seemed to him that he hovered above it, staring down at its pale stillness. There was a time when his brain was a pinpoint of energy, whirling in space, growing ever smaller . . . smaller . . . until it seemed to go out altogether . . . until there was nothing . . . nothing at all . . .

"Haley! Haley, wake up!"

Krishna's face hung over him, lean and saturnine in the gloom.

"You did it! You slowed your heart until it was inaudible . . . slowed your breathing until you were scarcely breathing at all. You did it! You reached a state of suspended animation!"

"All you have to do now is learn to control the length of time you stay in the trance. I didn't think it could be done, but you've learned in a year what it took me five years to learn. You sure must want that act of your own real bad."

Krishna's words were a marvel of understatement. "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I got ambition," Haley smiled.

He told Rosa that night. About his success. And she clung to him.

"At last! Tim, I'm so happy. Now, you'll be able to have your own act! I'll be able to leave Hank . . ."

"Not so fast." Rosa leaving Hank was not part of Haley's plans. "You'll stay with Hank! I'll get rid of him! In my own time and in my own way!"

"Get . . . rid of him?" Rosa's face paled.

"You heard me," Haley wasn't going to pull any punches now. He was ready. "Hank's going to die! Soon! And when he does, then you and I are getting married! But, not before! Hank's got money, insurance, a good business! I've got it all worked out!"

"No!" Rosa guessed, in that moment. She knew exactly what Hank was saying. "No, Tim! You're talking murder! I won't listen! You can't . . ."

"I can and I will . . . and you're going to help me! You just shut up and listen . . ."

"No! No, I won't listen! I won't . . ."

Haley slapped her. Hard.

"You'll listen. You'll do just as I say. Or maybe you'd like that husband of yours to get an earful about us? About what's been going on behind his back! You wouldn't like that, would you?"

No, Rosa wouldn't like that. So Rosa listened. And Haley's plan was so simple, so foolproof. Hank would die. Haley would see to that. Then, he would have two chances to get away with it. One: he might not even be suspected. And, two: That was where Rosa came in.

"You little sap," he sneered at her. "Did you think I spent a year learning that suspended animation gimmick just to start my own crummy act? Learning Krishna's stuff was my ace in the hole. If the cops do tumble to me and I'm pinned for it, I've got a way out."

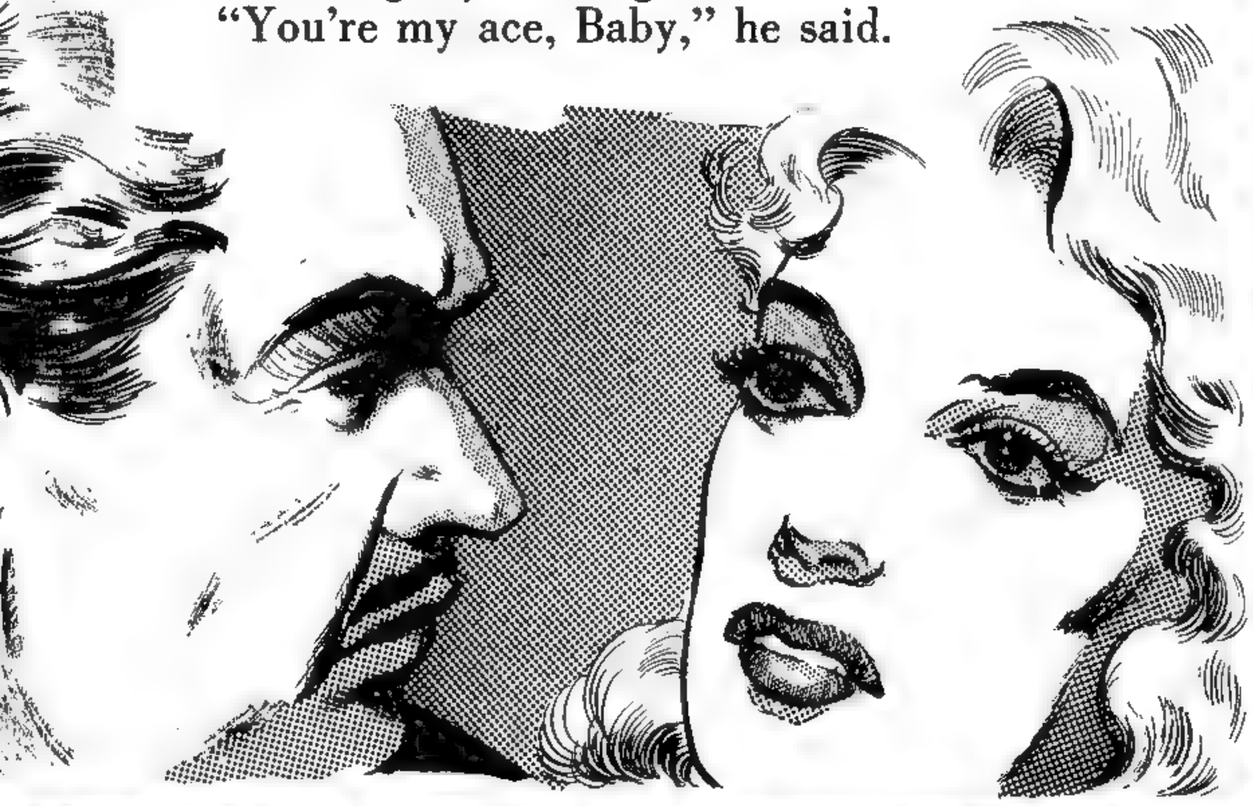
It was a beautiful idea. Haley was proud of it.

"Now, get this. If I'm convicted, you wait till I'm dead. Only, I won't *be* dead! Because, just before the execution, I go into my act. And no doctor on earth can tell suspended animation from the real McCoy. I get pronounced dead, and then, a day later, you claim my body. I come to . . . and that's it!"

"It can't miss," he added.

Rosa was breathing hard. Her pitiful little dream world had just fallen apart. Haley had demolished it. But he had no thought of that. He gripped her forearms tightly, hurting her.

"You're my ace, Baby," he said.



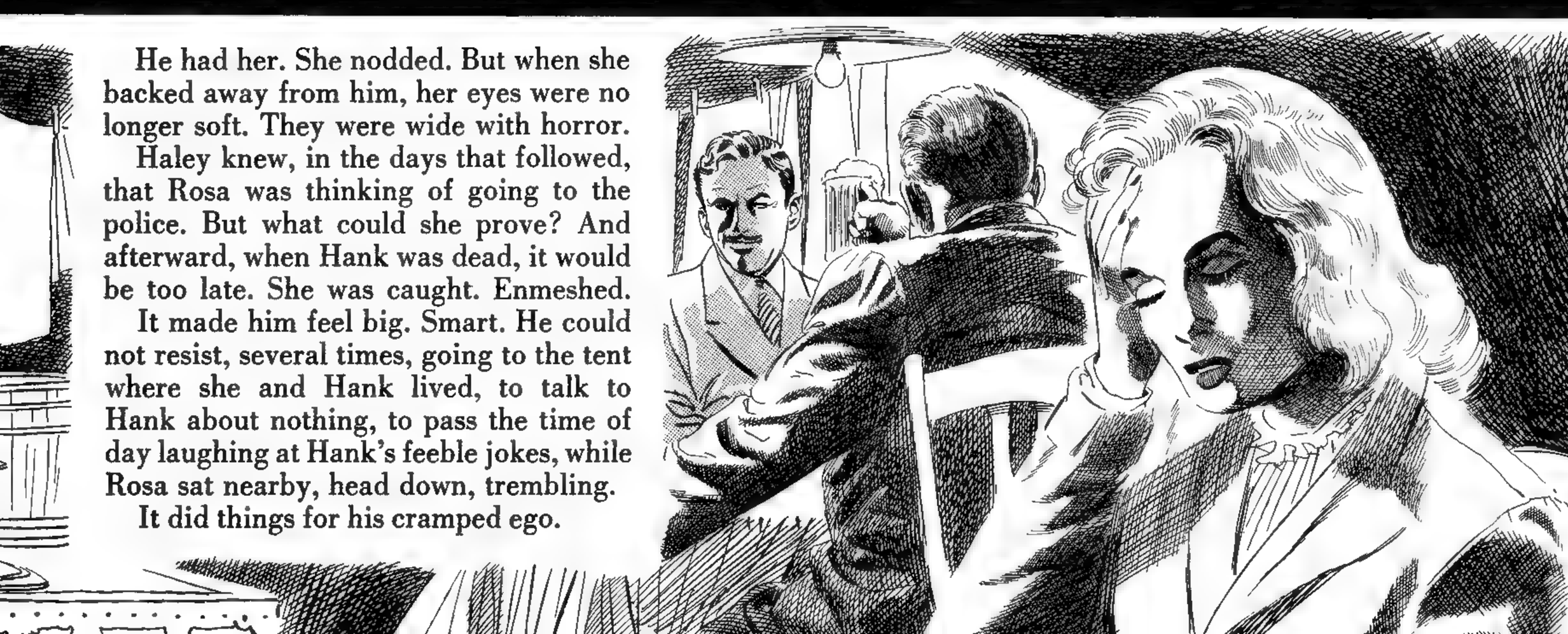
"Just remember. You do like I say. Otherwise, I tell Hank what's been going on. And if I go through with the setup and you don't show up at the jail to claim my body, just remember this: Thirty-six hours after I go into my act, I'll come to! And if you haven't shown, I'll swear you helped me kill Hank!"

He had her. She nodded. But when she backed away from him, her eyes were no longer soft. They were wide with horror.

Haley knew, in the days that followed, that Rosa was thinking of going to the police. But what could she prove? And afterward, when Hank was dead, it would be too late. She was caught. Enmeshed.

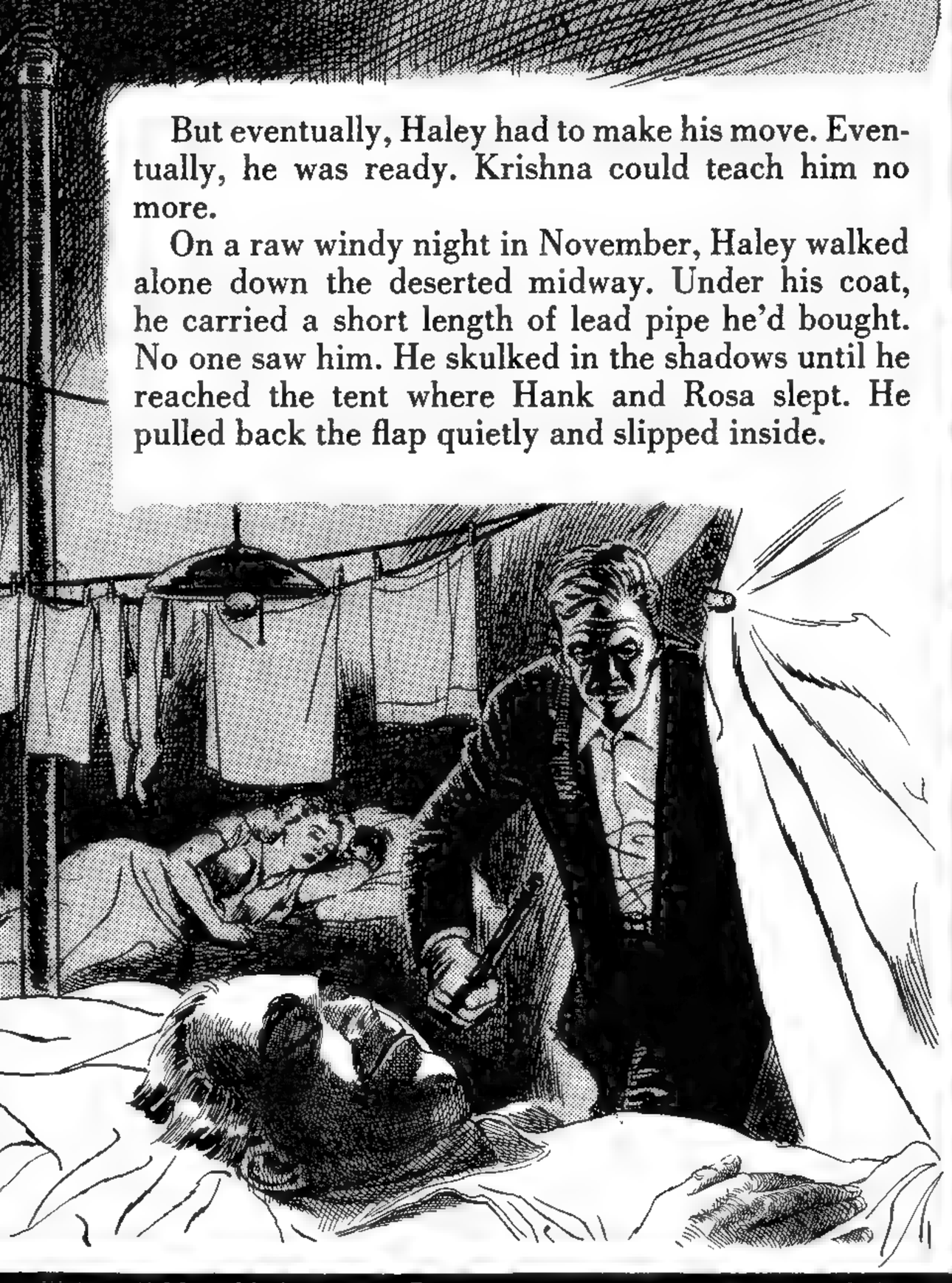
It made him feel big. Smart. He could not resist, several times, going to the tent where she and Hank lived, to talk to Hank about nothing, to pass the time of day laughing at Hank's feeble jokes, while Rosa sat nearby, head down, trembling.

It did things for his cramped ego.



But eventually, Haley had to make his move. Eventually, he was ready. Krishna could teach him no more.

On a raw windy night in November, Haley walked alone down the deserted midway. Under his coat, he carried a short length of lead pipe he'd bought. No one saw him. He skulked in the shadows until he reached the tent where Hank and Rosa slept. He pulled back the flap quietly and slipped inside.



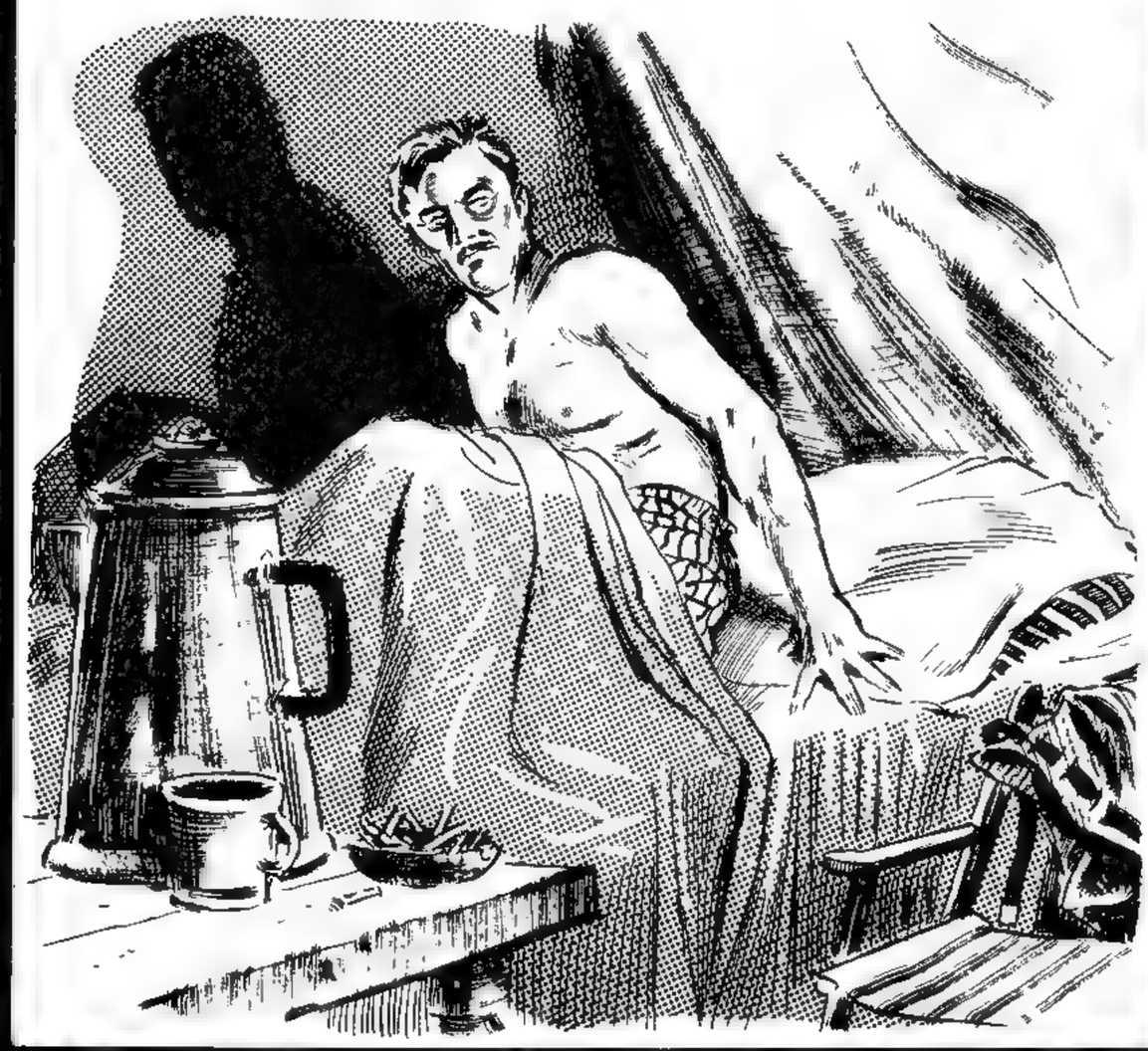
There were two cots inside. On one, Rosa slept, her head cradled in her arm. On the other, Hank lay snoring, face up, a stupid grin on his face.

Haley raised the pipe. He brought it down on the stupid grin, erasing it in a red smear.

Then, there was only the dull sucking thud as the lead pipe rose and fell, rose and fell. Two, three, four times. He lost count.

Haley dropped the pipe after he'd wiped it clean of prints, and walked out of the tent. He felt nothing. No regrets, no remorse, nothing. He walked back down the deserted midway to his own tent, undressed, and climbed into his cot. He slept well for the remainder of the night.

It was Rosa's voice which awakened him the next morning. Rosa, screaming insanely . . .



Afterward, Rosa was numb. When the police came, she told them nothing. Haley could smile at that. How could she? She didn't dare!

The police seemed dull, plodding. They held the carnival up for a week, then let it move on. The police were not nearly as clever as Haley.

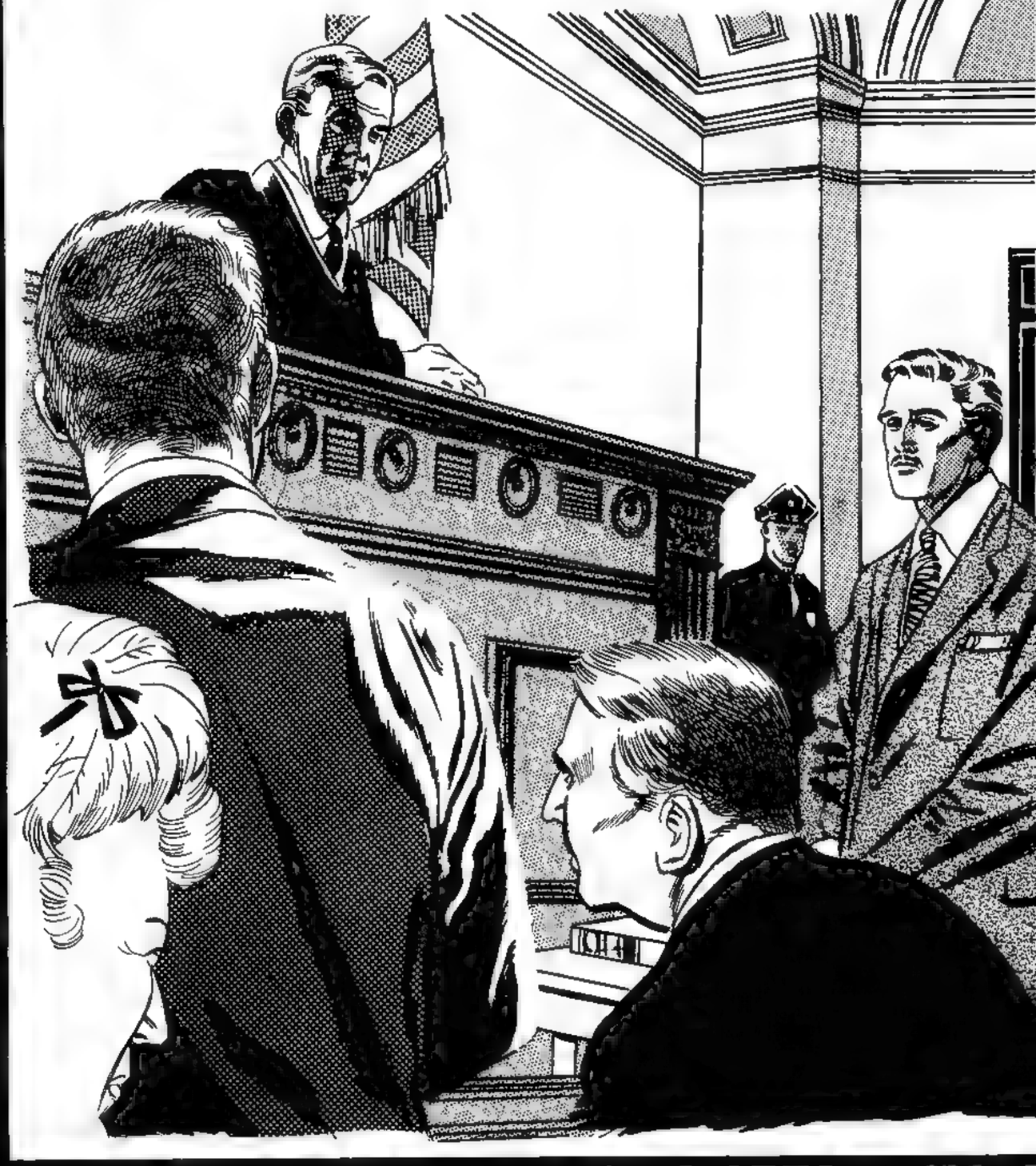
But they came for him a month later.

One of them told Haley how they'd traced the murder weapon . . . back along the road the carnival had travelled, to the tiny junk yard in the tiny town where Haley had bought it. He'd made a mistake in judgment.

Haley cursed his own stupidity, but then resigned himself. When they took him away, he let his eyes fall meaningfully on Rosa.

The trial was short. The court could prove no motive, but the evidence of the murder weapon, once Haley had been positively identified as the purchaser, was overwhelming. That, plus his proximity to the scene of the crime, his lack of any explanation, brought the verdict of the jury back to the courtroom after only an hour of deliberation:

Guilty.



Once, during the long weeks before his execution, Haley wrote to Rosa. Just an innocent-seeming letter in which he swore that he had not killed her husband and begged her to come see him so that he might tell her so himself.

But Rosa did not come, and Haley came near to panic. Without Rosa, he could not succeed.

His second letter was far more clever.

This time, Rosa came. Because in this letter, Haley hinted cleverly at his plan. Because he threatened her shrewdly, in such a way that Rosa would understand but the prison censor would not.

Rosa sat opposite him, beyond the metal mesh, in the little room off the condemned row, and Haley tried to convince her that he had not killed her husband.

That was for the benefit of the listening guard. In the end, Haley managed to get across to Rosa the real reason why he had sent for her. It was simple. When the guard turned aside for a moment, Haley whispered, "We were very good friends once, Rosa. I hope we're *still* good friends! For *both* our sakes. We . . . *are* good friends still, aren't we?"

The words were just words, but the inference was plain to Rosa. She nodded. That was enough for Haley.

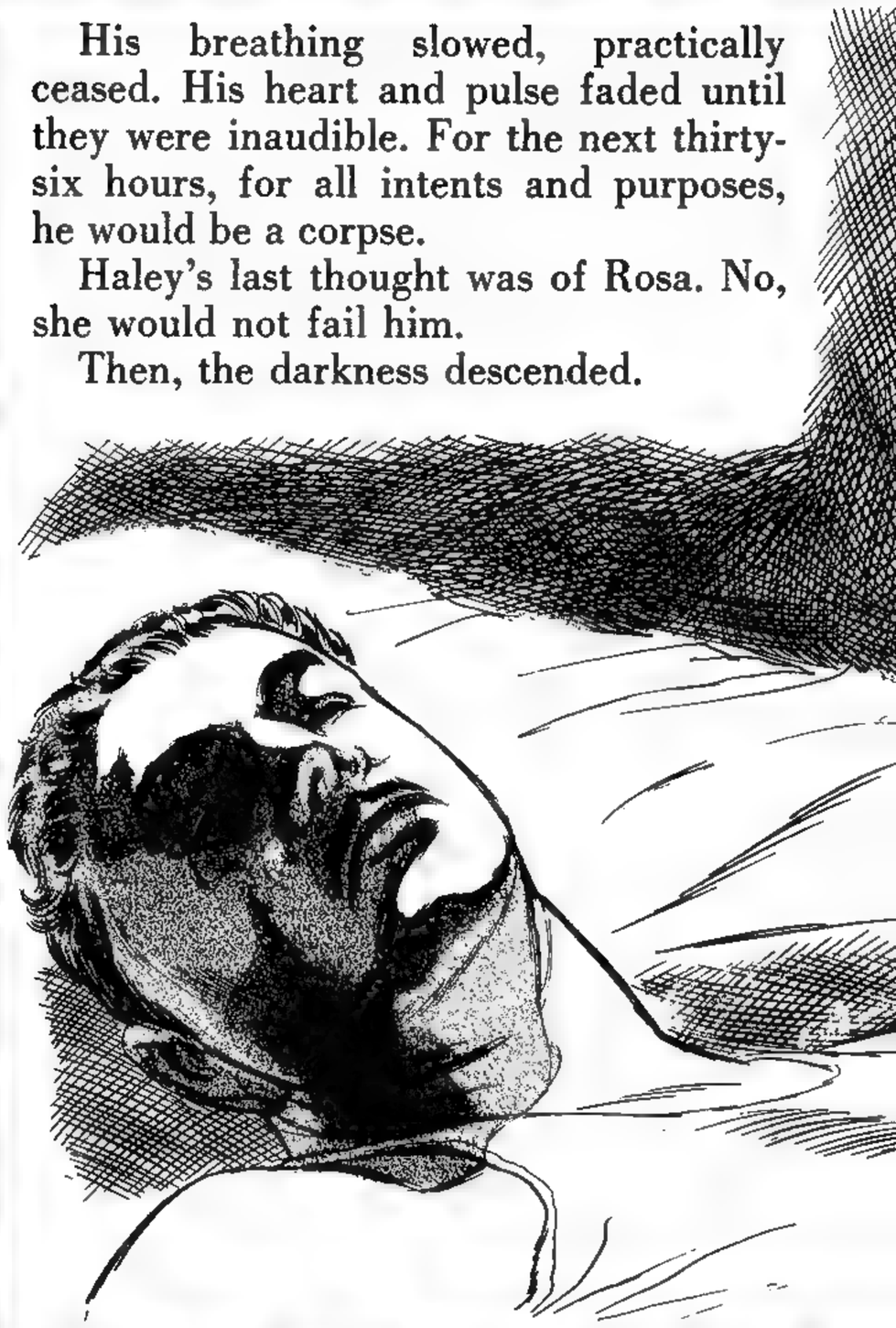
No, Rosa would not let him down. How could she? If she did, it would be so simple to drag her down with him.

Haley waited. Until the night of the execution. Then, quite calmly, he stretched out on his cot, under the glaring light of the naked electric bulb, and closed his eyes.

His breathing slowed, practically ceased. His heart and pulse faded until they were inaudible. For the next thirty-six hours, for all intents and purposes, he would be a corpse.

Haley's last thought was of Rosa. No, she would not fail him.

Then, the darkness descended.



Nor did Rosa fail him.

She heard the news on the radio. She stood with her hands over her face, listening to the voice of the announcer, and her indecision was a palpable, throbbing thing. Her fingers were weak when she silenced the squawking box.

It was such a simple decision. Do as Haley asked, claim his body . . . or die with him. Haley would not hesitate to condemn her. Yet Rosa hesitated. Rosa was many things, but she was not a criminal, a murderess. She was a soft blob of helplessness, molded by the harsh feelings of circumstance.

She went to the prison, finally, twenty-four hours after Haley's "death," as he'd instructed her. She stood outside the towering gates and waited.

Finally, a guard came and led her into the concrete bowels of the prison to the warden's office.

He was a kindly man, the warden. He was all sympathy to Rosa's obvious nervousness. He soothed her.

"Mrs. Price," he said finally, "tell me something. You don't believe that Haley killed your husband, do you? I mean, when you called and asked permission to claim his body, I naturally assumed . . ."

"Warden, please. You said it was all right. You said I could claim the body for burial." Rosa was scared. Why the questions?

"And so you shall. Haley had no relatives, and the state denies no man his right to decent burial. Still . . ." The warden was curious.

That was the final indignity, the final horror. The lie that Rosa had to speak.

"No! No, I don't believe that Haley killed my husband! Would I . . . would I come here like this if I did?" She almost screamed it.

The warden asked no more questions. He was satisfied.

"Very well, Mrs. Price." He pressed a button on his desk. "You may have Tim Haley's remains. I'll send for them."

"You mean right this moment? But I thought . . . I arranged for a hearse!" Rosa glanced at the clock. "It won't be here for another ten minutes!"

"Hearse?" The warden looked at her.

A guard was coming in. He was carrying something. The warden took it, set it on his desk before Rosa.

And suddenly, Rosa was laughing. Not with her eyes or her lips or her voice, but deep inside. Laughing with a bitter laughter that bubbled and welled within the prison of her body. Laughing with a silent laughter that edged on madness.

"You won't require a hearse, Mrs. Price," the warden was saying. "In this State, the law requires that the body of any prisoner not claimed within twelve hours after death must be cremated!

"Tim Haley's *ashes* are in this urn!"

THE END

REST IN PEACE

THURSDAY: I feel impelled to write. There is an air of decay about this place. I have just returned from the burial grounds. Paul took me there. We stood in the rain before the mausoleum, with the low rumble of thunder for counterpoint, and the harsh glare of lightning, blue-white on the old tombstones. And he told me why he had sent for me.

I arrived here this evening. Not two hours ago, I walked up the gravel drive to this old house, with its gables peering like rheumy eyes over the tops of the gnarled trees amid which it is set. There was no rain then. Only the wind, whipping the naked branches, and whining through the eaves.

A manservant, sere and old as the house itself, took my bags. And then Paul stood with me by the open door, not speaking, until I walked inside and saw for the first time the musty, massive furnishings and smelled for the first time the dank heaviness of the gloomy interior.

"I was afraid you would not come." Paul spoke, but his voice was thin.

Paul had changed since our days at the University together. He was pale, with the skin stretched tight across his forehead so that it seemed carven from alabaster.

"Your letter said that you needed help, Paul. What else are friends for?" I tried to smile, but in that place, my words hung hollowly. "You don't look well, Paul. Is that it? Are you ill?"

Paul looked at me. "Ill? Yes . . ." He led the way to a shadowy sitting room where a girl sat in pale silence in the gloom. "This is Cathy . . . my sister. Cathy, I want you to meet an old friend. Walter . . ."

She was . . . how can I write it? . . . A whisp. A thing beautiful, yet without substance. A white, sickly thing behind whose eyes there lurked a certain something. A certain look of . . . fear.

I spoke of that fear to Paul. Later. After Cathy had smiled her wan smile and gone to her room. And the fear was there in Paul's eyes, too.

"Fear? Yes, we know fear, Walter. You asked if I was ill. We are both ill, Cathy and I! We are both afraid!"

"Afraid . . . of what?" I asked.

"Of death. And of what will come . . . after." And the fear in Paul's eyes flamed.

I did not understand. I told him so. I spoke of doctors. But Paul just shook his head. His words fell like stones in the silence.

"There is no cure for our illness, Walter!"

He told me, then. About his family. About how they died . . . or seemed to die. About how they faded, and breathed their last, and yet were not truly dead. About how they had been placed in their tombs . . . alive. Because no one had suspected. Not until it was too late. I had heard the tale before. But, before, Paul had not been afraid. Before, I had not met Cathy.

"You're not making sense, Paul," I said. "You've known about this illness in your family. Why should you start to fear it now? If you really think you're near death, surely your doctor would know."

"My doctor laughs at my fears. But fear grows, Walter. All these years, it's been growing inside me, like a cancer. Now . . . come with me."

It was then that he took me to the burial grounds. We walked through the trees with the rain pelting us softly, and as we walked the wind grew stronger. And when we stood before the granite mausoleum, it shrieked like a tormented soul. I did not want to enter, but Paul pushed open the massive door and I followed. Into that place of death, where the corpses lay in their eternal night. And I saw the casket, bronze, resting upon a stone slab. It lay open, empty. From it, a chain led to the ceiling and across it. I could not see where it vanished into the shadows.

"The chain leads to the house, to my room. Beside my bed, there is a bell."

Paul spoke to me, and his eyes were burning coals, burning with the fear.

"Now you understand! If I die, I will be placed in this casket. And if I am not truly dead, if I revive, I will be able to signal! Before it is too late!"

His voice echoed hollowly in the cold gloom of the mausoleum.

I had to escape that place. I fled. But outside, Paul caught up to me. "Walter, promise! Promise that if I die, or seem to, you will stay in my room. For seven days. Promise!" His voice was pleading.

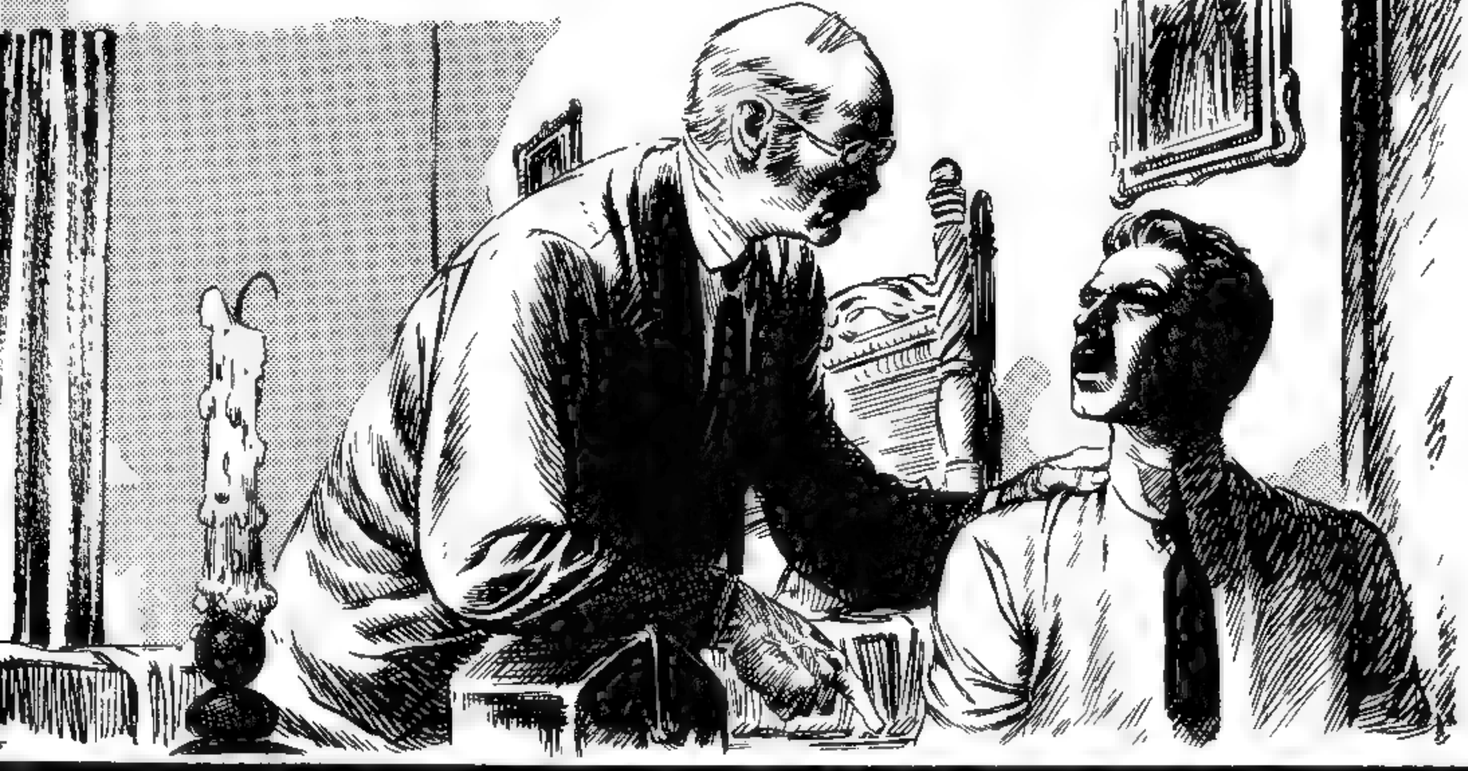
"But, Cathy . . . there's Cathy! If you should signal, *she* would hear!" I reasoned with him.

"No! Cathy is weak! She could not stand the shock! Walter, my time is near! Every instinct I have screams it! Promise me!" He clutched my arm.

What could I say? I have agreed. So, now, I sit in my bedroom, with the wind tapping skeleton fingers on my window and the candle flickering and throwing eerie, swaying shadows about me, and I write this account.

God only knows how it will all end. I want to run from this frightening place. But . . . I cannot! I know I must stay!

FRIDAY: Last night, I was troubled in my sleep. But the morning dawned bright and clear. And I have had a visitor. A Doctor Cooper. He came to see me early.



Doctor Cooper knows about the bronze coffin and the chain.

But the doctor believes that Paul is suffering from delusions. He believes that Paul's illness is of the mind.

He is more concerned with Cathy than he is with Paul. Cathy is the weaker of the two and she has succumbed to this house, to Paul's terror.

Doctor Cooper has asked me to try to make Paul relax. He frankly does not believe the stories about Paul's ancestors.

If I can make Paul forget his obsession, all may still be well.

All that is needed is for Paul to rest, to build his strength, so that he may face his delusions sanely.

I will do what I can.

SATURDAY: It is no use. Paul will not listen to me. I went to him, but he smiled and shook his head. He will not rest. All day, he paces in his room. I can hear him, through the wall . . .

SUNDAY: I have been with Cathy. I went to her an hour ago. She was in the gloomy sitting room, and I tried to make her understand. I gazed at that sickly loveliness and my heart broke for her. But she will not do as I ask. I can hear her words yet:

"Go away, Walter? No! Paul will never leave this house! Nor will I! We belong here. Here, we are close to the past. To the others. To those who have gone before."

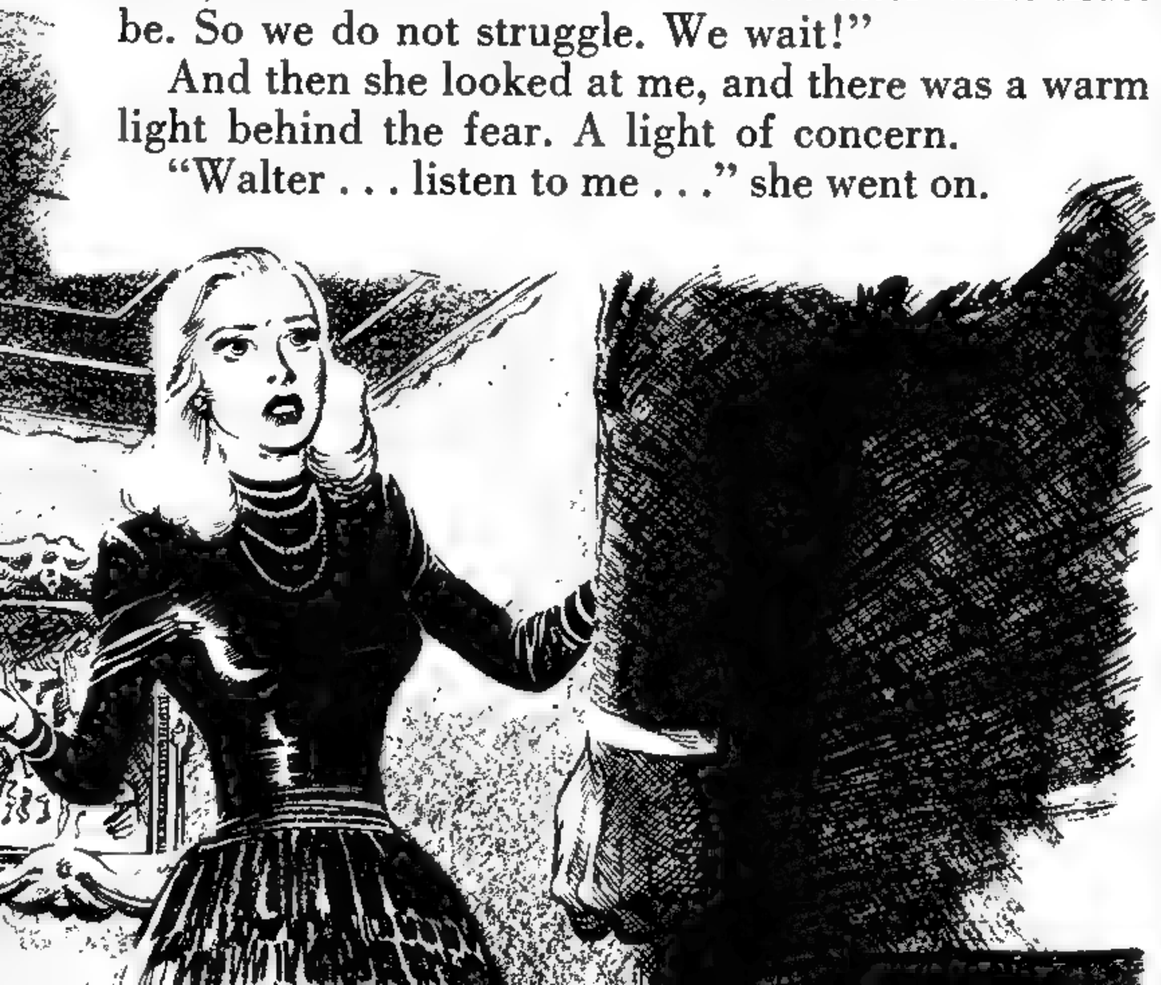
I am being influenced by this awful place. I meant to speak calmly, sanely, but the words burst from my lips:

"The past! The past is dust! Can't you see what's happening to you? Paul's madness has infected you!"

"Madness?" Cathy smiled. "Paul and I are not mad, Walter. We know we cannot alter what must be. So we do not struggle. We wait!"

And then she looked at me, and there was a warm light behind the fear. A light of concern.

"Walter . . . listen to me . . ." she went on.



"Go! Go, now! Leave this house! Paul and I are not part of your world! Leave, before the horror that hangs over us takes you also!"

But, how can I leave now? How can I go, after the way Cathy looked at me. I must save her from this insanity. I must! I must stay!

MONDAY: Paul is avoiding me. He knows that I will try to make him rest, that I will attempt to make him see things sanely. But there is still Cathy. I went to her again tonight. There was a moon, and when I found her, she was in the garden, seated upon a stone bench, with the moonlight bathing her hair in pale brilliance. She seemed to glow, as some plants glow in the swamps where they grow, palely. I told her so, and that warm look came into her eyes again.

"You're a poet, Walter," she smiled. "But you must make poems about the living, not the dead!"

"Death! Always death!" I could not stop my flow of words. "Cathy, forget about death! Live!"

"You should have a sweetheart, Cathy," I said warmly, drawing near her. "Someone to love you."

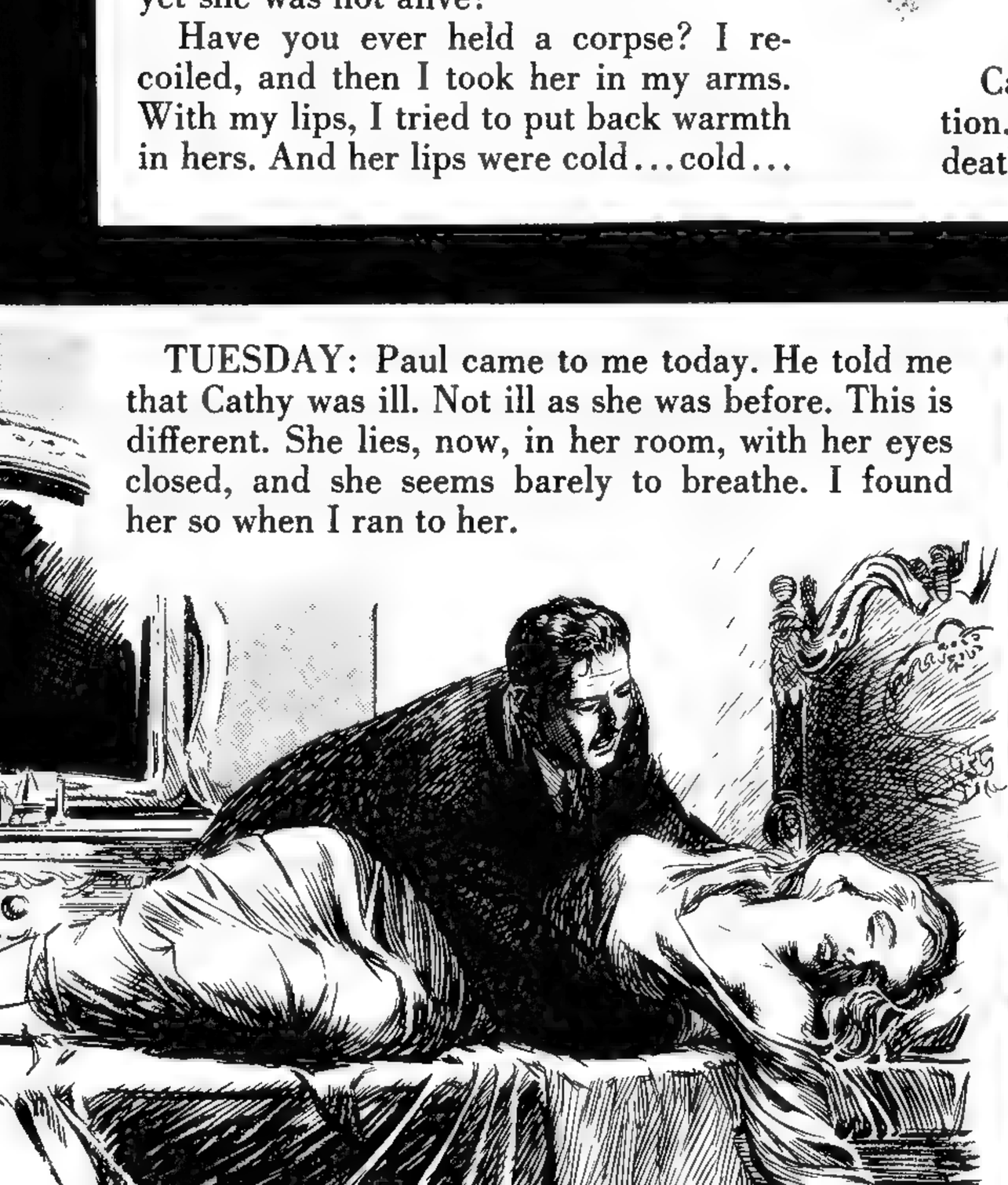
"But . . . I have a sweetheart, Walter!" She looked at me, and I thought: Ah, how beautiful she is! "My sweetheart is here! Now!" I could not believe my ears. "He waits for me in the night and soon we shall be together. Soon, I shall feel the touch of his lips, like ice . . ."

Death! She spoke of death! How could I help it if I recoiled, if suddenly I saw her as a corpse. For she was! She lived, and yet she was not alive!

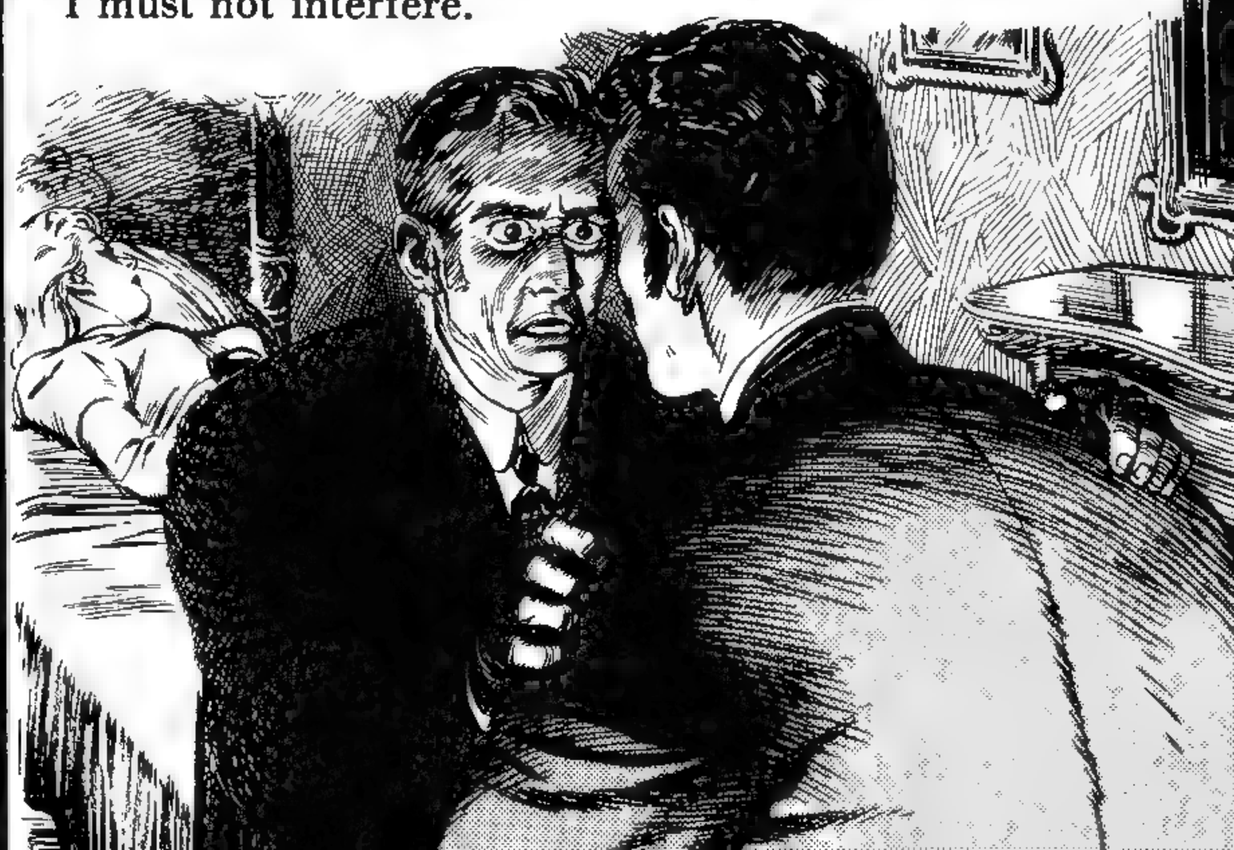
Have you ever held a corpse? I recoiled, and then I took her in my arms. With my lips, I tried to put back warmth in hers. And her lips were cold...cold...

Cathy is mad! As Paul is mad! There is no other explanation. They are willing themselves to die! They fear a living death, and yet they seek what they fear!

TUESDAY: Paul came to me today. He told me that Cathy was ill. Not ill as she was before. This is different. She lies, now, in her room, with her eyes closed, and she seems barely to breathe. I found her so when I ran to her.

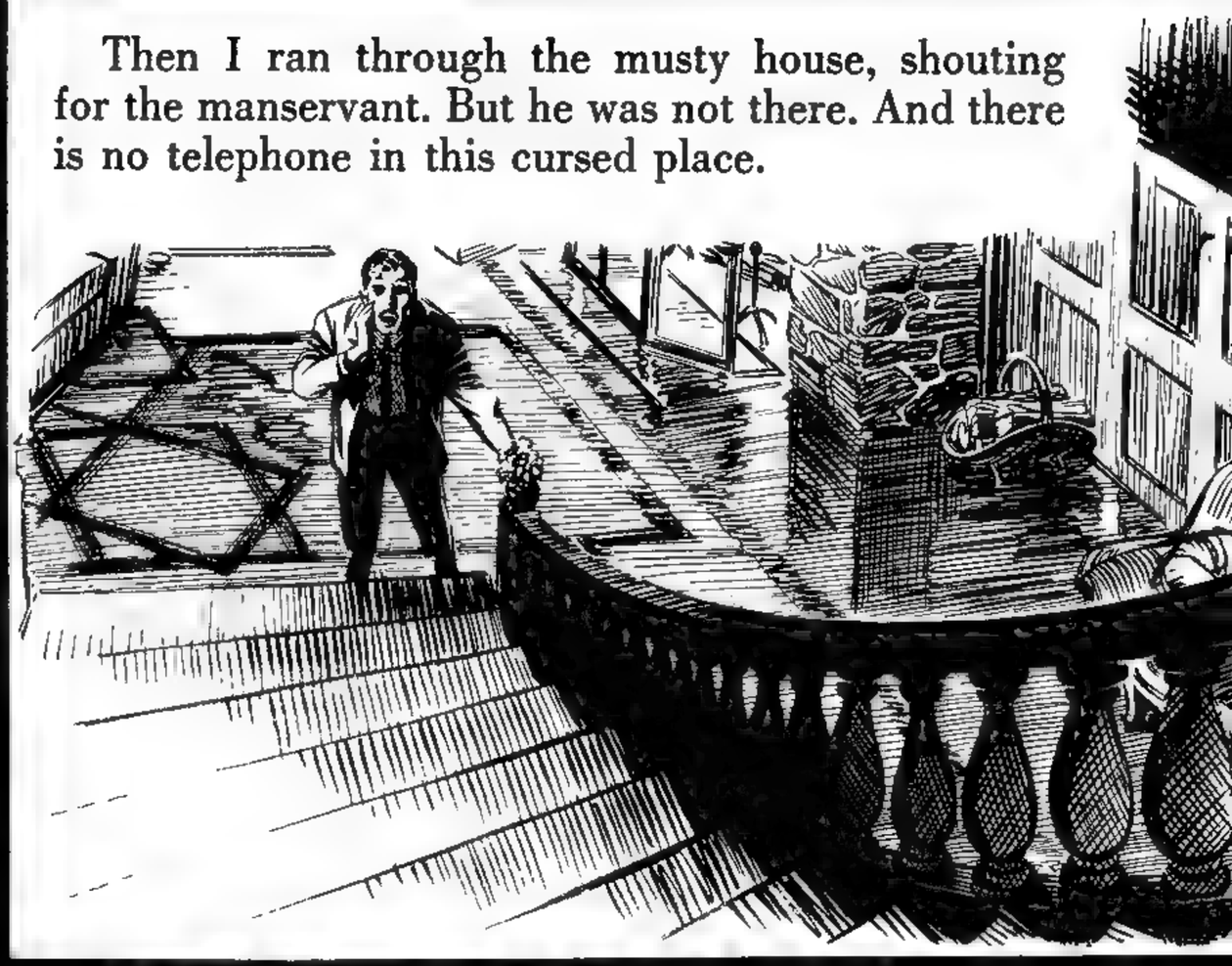


She was dying. I could see that. But when I would have sent for Doctor Cooper, Paul would not let me. He stood before the door and spoke wildly. He said that this was as it was meant to be, and that I must not interfere.



It was then that I struck him. I had no choice. Cathy was dying and he would not let me call a doctor. I lashed out and knocked him to the floor.

Then I ran through the musty house, shouting for the manservant. But he was not there. And there is no telephone in this cursed place.

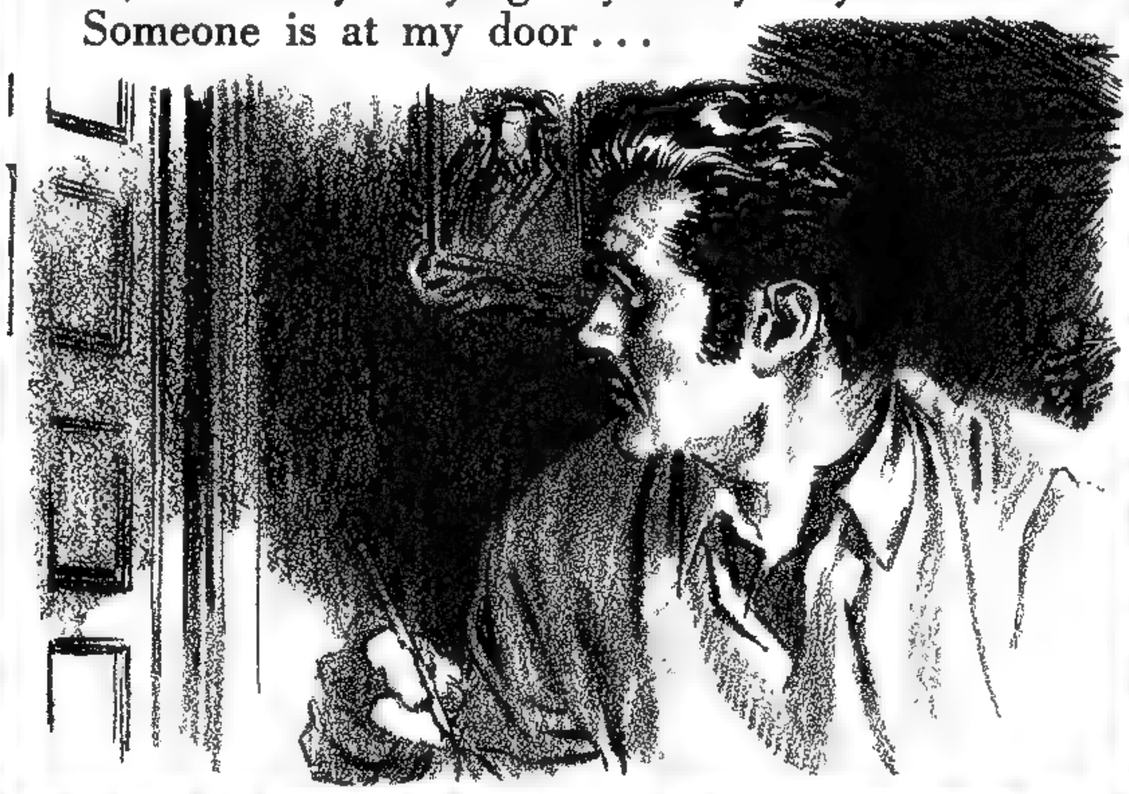


I went to the village myself. I ran all the way there and found the doctor, and brought him back. But his drugs were of no avail.

Cathy did not revive. She still lies out there as I write. My hand trembles.

What irony! What grim, fantastic irony! Paul lives, and Cathy is dying. My Cathy! My . . .

Someone is at my door . . .



LATER: It was the doctor. Cathy is dead. I cannot believe it.

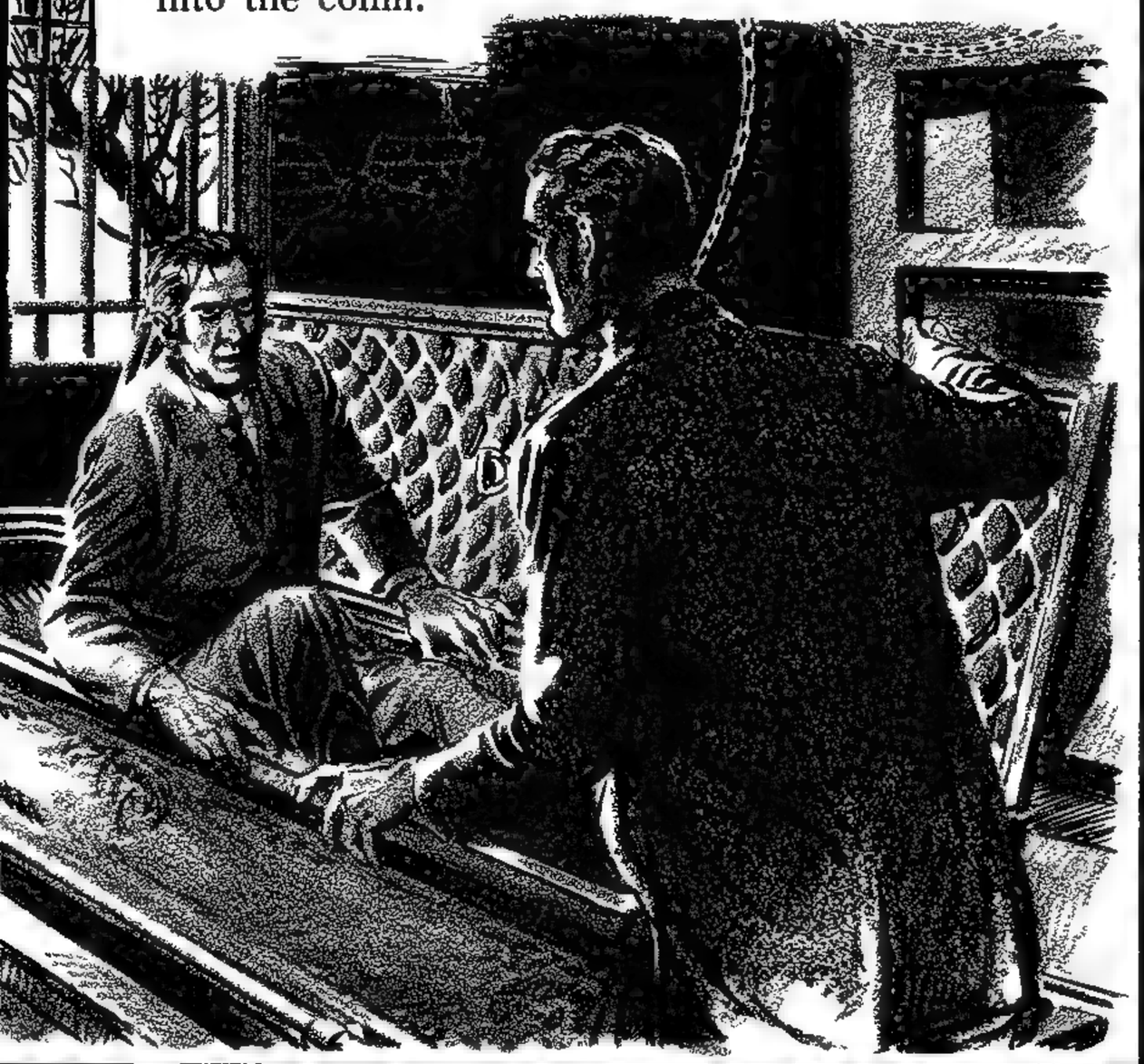
Only moments ago, I stood beside her bed. And now she is dead.

I tried to comfort Paul, but he wants no comfort. Almost, I hate him! But of what use is hate? Cathy is dead!

Paul does not believe it. He sits by her side and stares into that beautiful, lifeless face. And when I speak to him, he shakes his head and mouths insane words. He touches Cathy's hands and whispers that it is only the flesh that has died. He says that her soul will return, and that when it does, Cathy will live again.

But Doctor Cooper has left nothing undone. Every test known to medical science has been made. Cathy is dead.

WEDNESDAY: Paul and I were at the mausoleum today. Paul has decided that Cathy must rest in the bronze casket which he had prepared for himself. He wanted to test the bell. He is determined to remain in his room after the funeral services so that he will hear the signal if Cathy should revive and need him. My blood curdled as I watched him climb into the coffin.

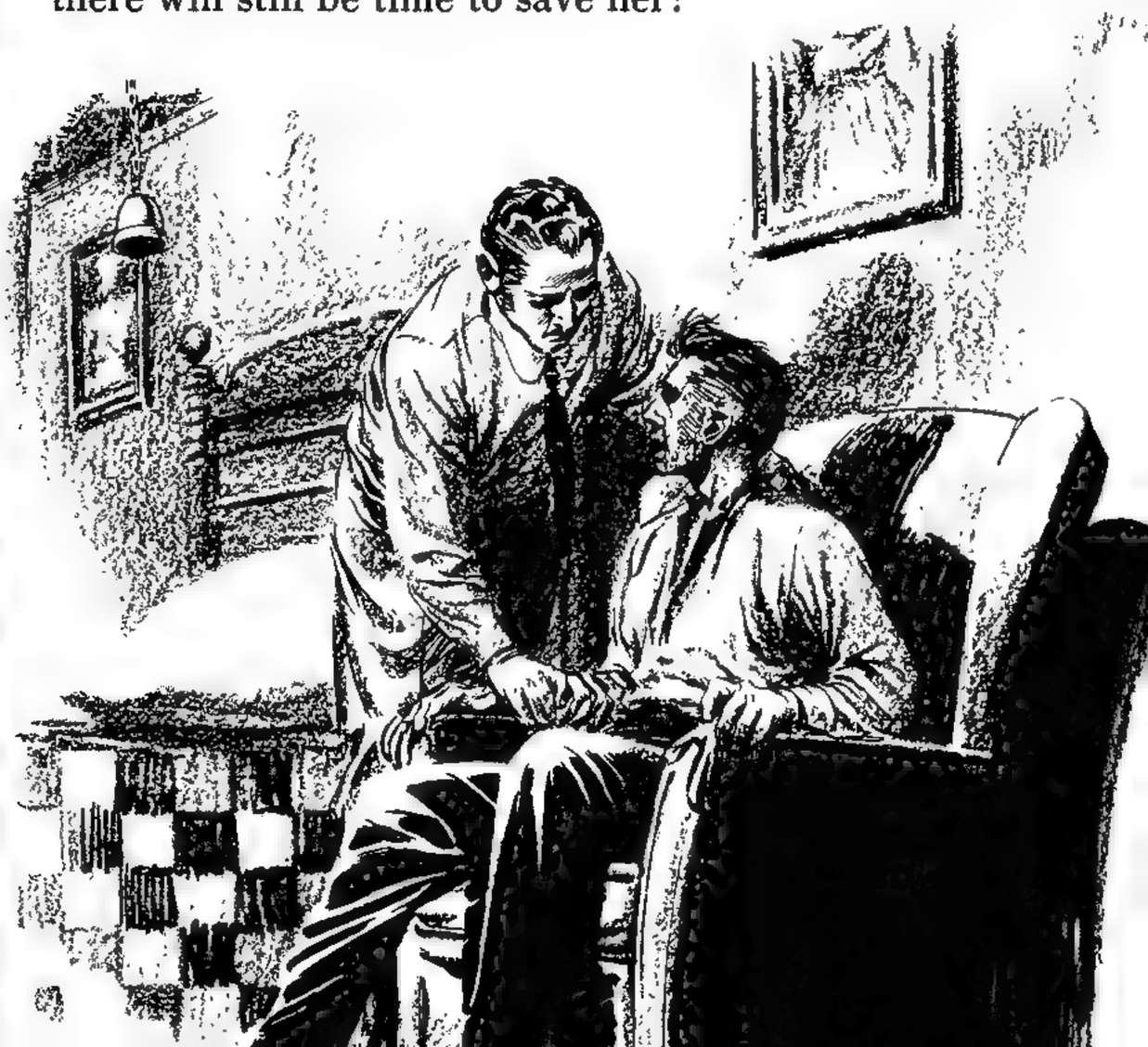


THURSDAY: We buried Cathy today. We placed her in the casket and stood by it as the services were read. And I wept for what might have been. Part of my being lies there in the darkness with Cathy, interred forever with her in a shell of bronze.

LATER: It is Paul I must think of now. It is past midnight, but still he paces his room. His footsteps thud emptily beyond the wall. He must rest. He must.

FRIDAY: Paul did not sleep last night. He was seated in a big chair when I entered his room this morning, his red-rimmed, deep-sunken eyes fixed upon the bell which hangs by his bed. He did not turn when I spoke. Only his whisper reached me, dry, as the rustle of dead leaves.

"Rest? Fool! You can speak of rest when Cathy lies alone in a coffin? I must wait. If the bell rings, there will still be time to save her!"



MONDAY: I have not written for two days. What is there to write? Paul still has not slept. How he endures, I do not know. But he must rest . . . or die. It is late now, and still I hear him pacing beyond the wall. If only he would stop. If only he would take a little of the warm milk I had the manservant bring to him.

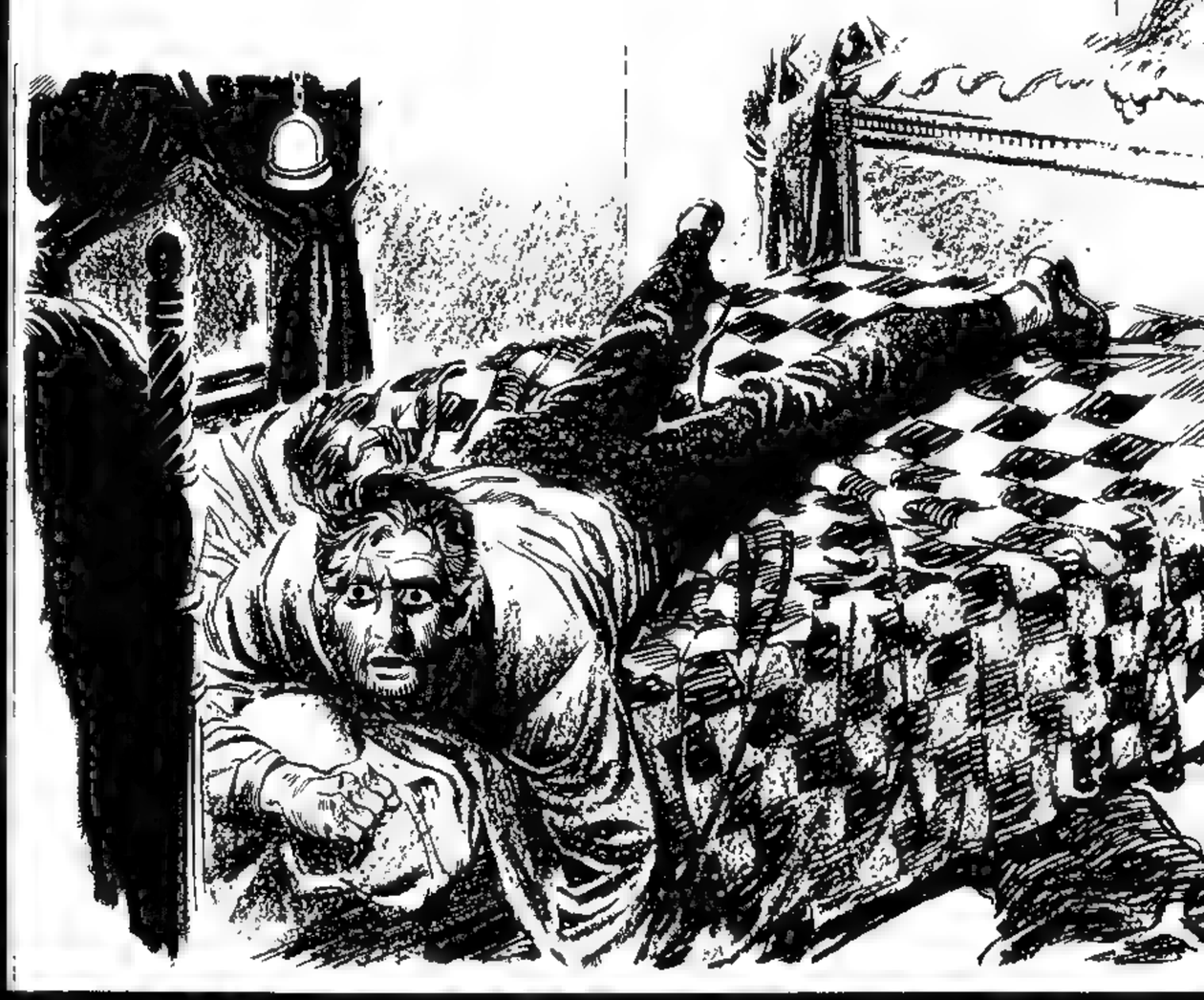
Paul had been dreaming. He told me, there in the grey morning light, in that musty room, that he had dreamed Cathy still lived. In his dream, he'd heard the bell. It had jangled insistently. But he'd not been able to move. He'd lain there, as if paralyzed. Until the jangle had ceased.

I could not stop him as he ran from the room. He shouted wildly about it *not* being a dream! He was going to Cathy! To the mausoleum!

TUESDAY: It cannot be! Something has happened! Something so horrible, I cannot find the words . . .

This morning I went to Paul again. And I found him asleep, the empty milk glass beside him.

But as I entered, he stirred. He gazed at me with an expression I cannot describe. And he spoke one word: "Cathy!"



I can feel it yet. The morning mist, wet upon my face as I followed him. The whipping branches that tore at my eyes. The grey mass of the vault, looming ahead, with the mist curling around it like possessive phantom fingers.

It was like a dream. My dream, this time. A nightmare come true. I saw Paul put his weight to the great door, saw it swing open, heard the creak of the hinges.

I paused at the door, waiting. I could not enter the place of death. I could not bear to see the grief which would etch the lines deeper into Paul's face when he learned that his mad race was in vain.

And then I heard Paul's voice. I heard it start as a choking cry and modulate into a shriek . . . the animal shriek that sometimes tears itself from the very bowels of a man. The shuddering scream of despair that chills the blood in the veins and freezes the marrow in the bones.

He was on the floor when I dashed in. He had struck his head in falling. There was blood and he lay quite still.

But it was not upon Paul that my eyes rivetted themselves. It was the open coffin.

I walked, like a sleepwalker to the side of the casket. And I saw.

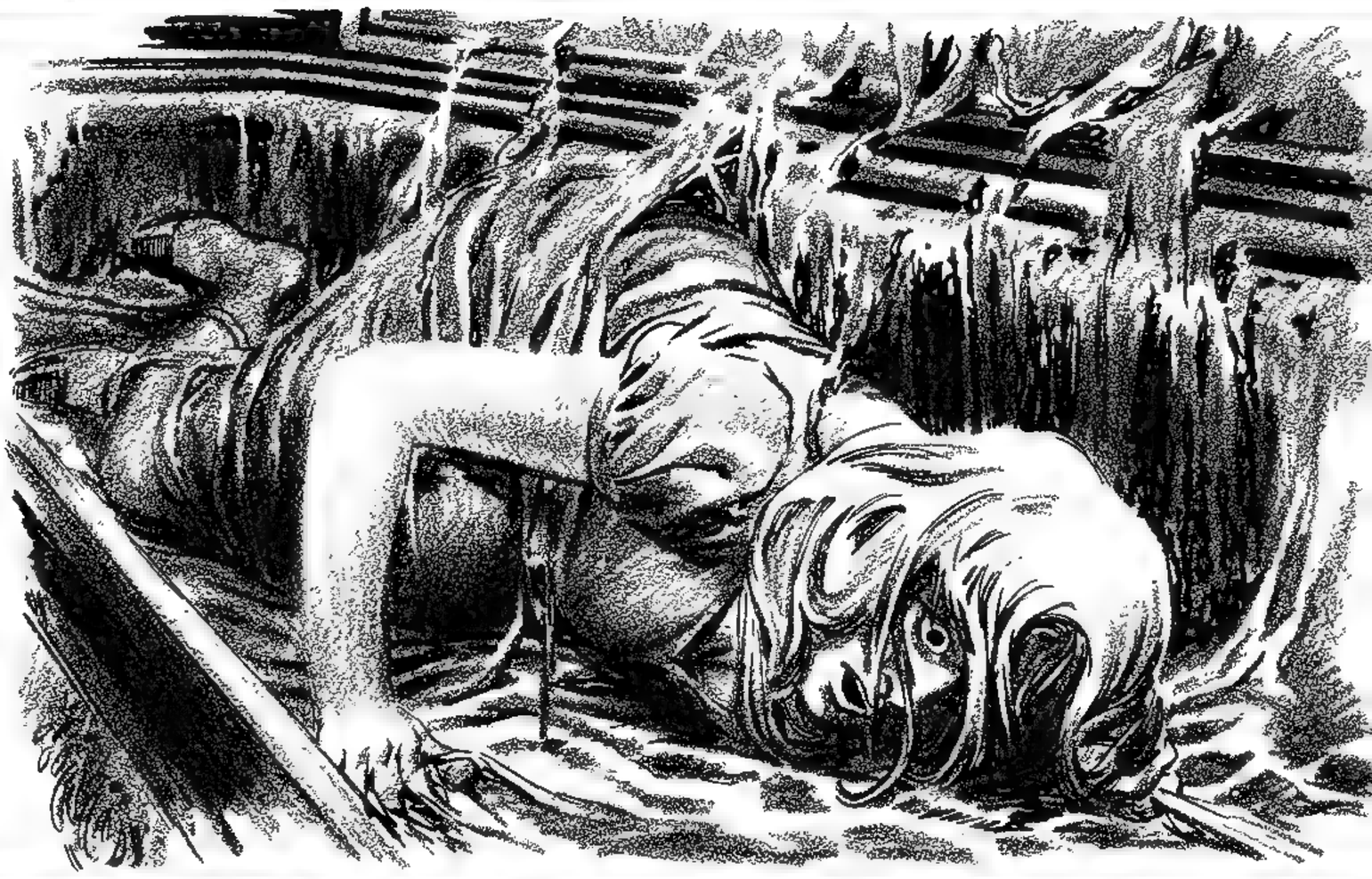
Dear Heaven. I saw!

Paul had pulled out the bolts which secured the lid. That had been part of his plan. To leave the bolts hanging loosely in their sockets so that when the time came, they would slide easily out. They lay now, on the stone floor beside him. And the lid of the coffin had been swung open.

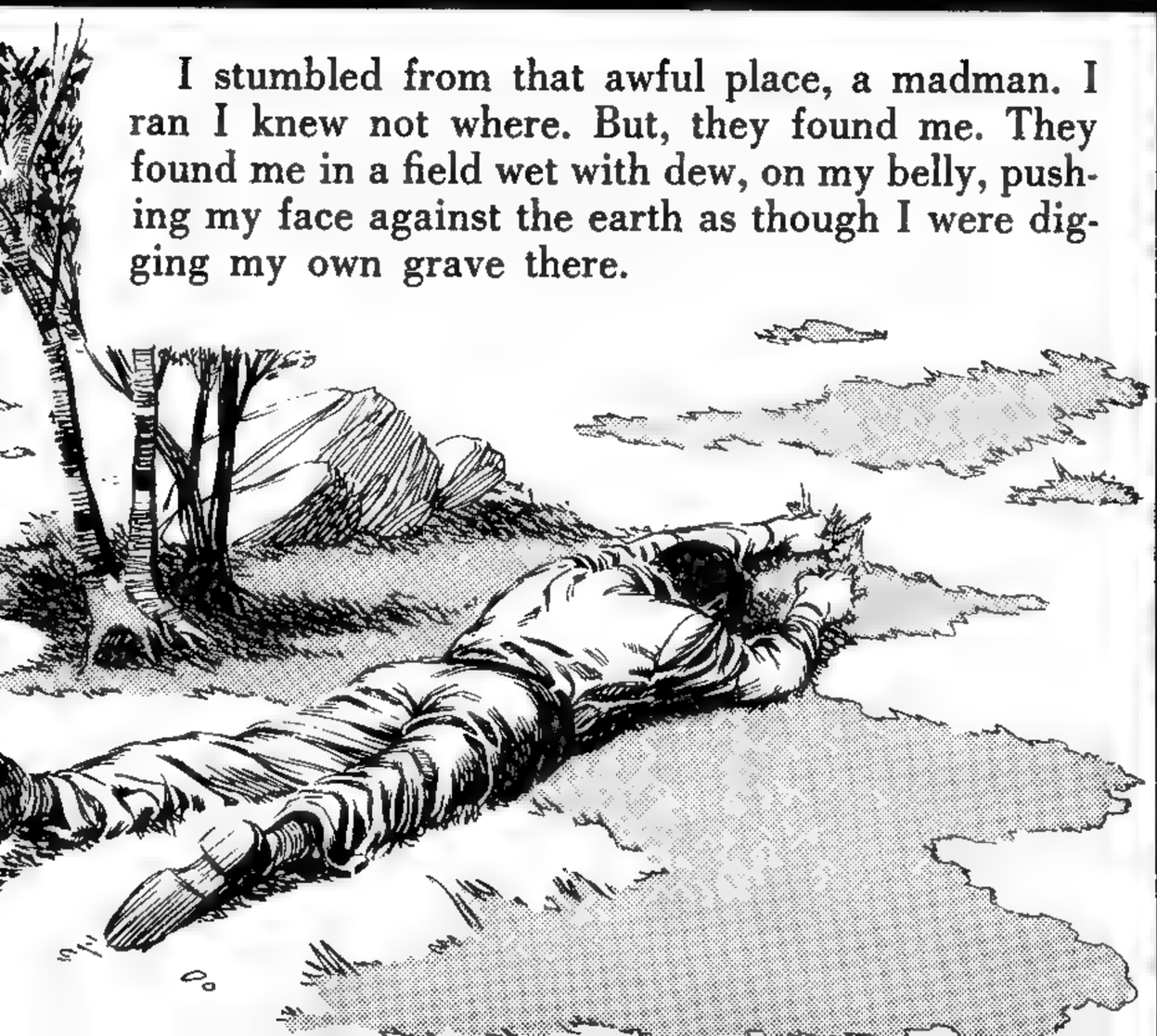
Cathy lay upon her side within, and the golden cascade of her hair had come undone, half obscuring her scratched and tortured face.

The shroud which had girdled her was torn and rent as if, in her agony, she had clawed at it with her fingers.

And the satin lining of the casket was shredded and bloody from her pounding and screaming and scratching.



I stumbled from that awful place, a madman. I ran I knew not where. But, they found me. They found me in a field wet with dew, on my belly, pushing my face against the earth as though I were digging my own grave there.



I was ill. Burning with fever. But I did not die. My madness lasted until now. It is night. Eleven hours have passed since I went to the tomb with Paul.

Only eleven hours. And ahead of me stretches a whole lifetime. I can write no more. Not now . . .

WEDNESDAY: The fever is gone. I am calmer now. But how much better it would have been if I had died.

Paul is dead, as Cathy is dead. He died there in the gloom beside her torn body from the blow on the head he suffered when he fell. The doctor told me.

I must set it all down. While I can. Who knows how long my sanity will endure?

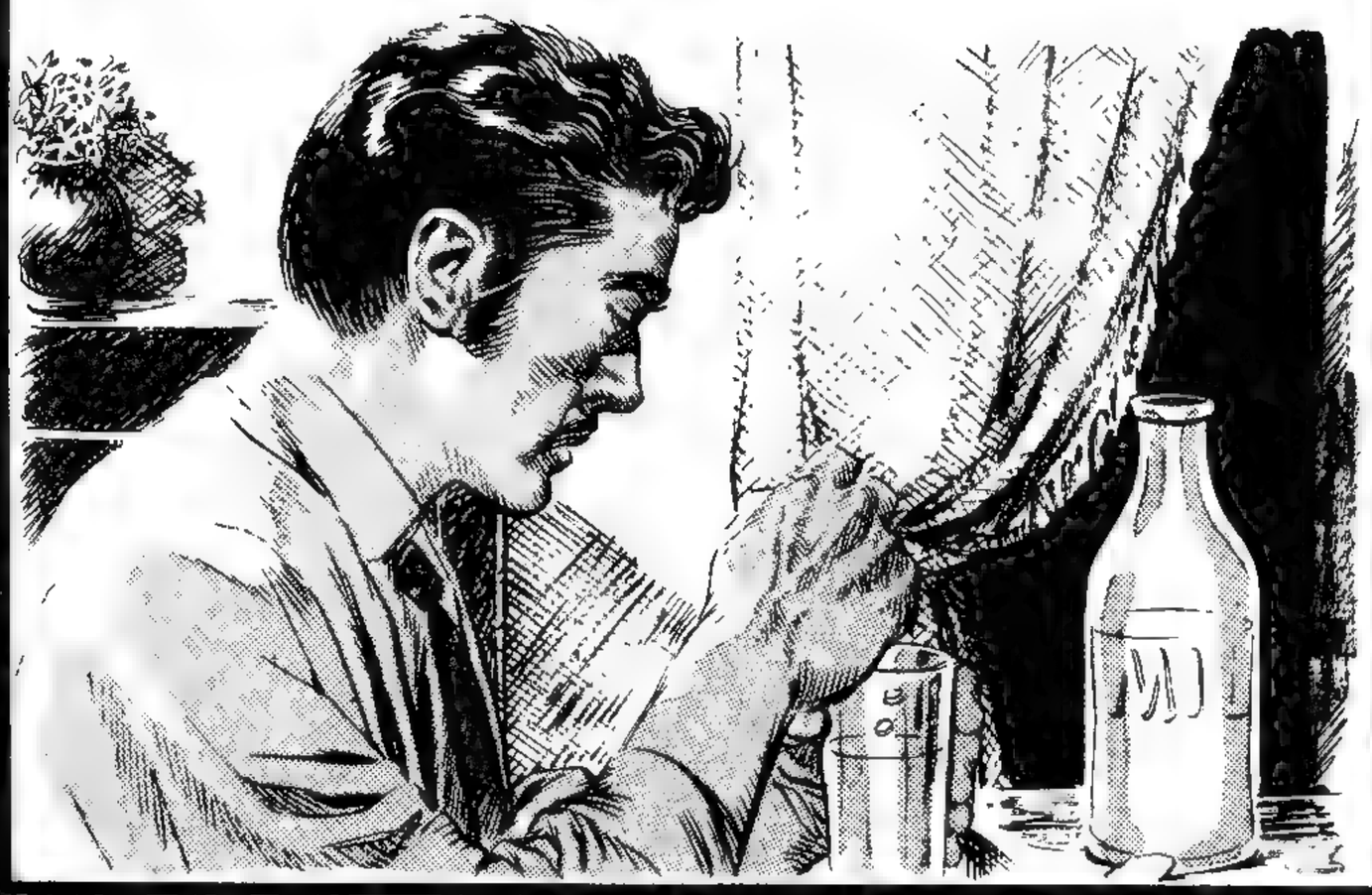
Cathy was placed, living, in the tomb. Cathy, my poor darling! She was locked, living, in the bronze casket . . . and then she awakened!

Oh, God, how she must have struggled! How she must have fought! Tearing at the chain within the casket until her fingers were torn and bleeding!

And all in vain. All for nothing. Because Paul slept! Soundly! Deeply! Completely! Not hearing the tolling of the bell except in his troubled dreams.

It is that which I keep remembering! I keep seeing that awful picture of Paul sleeping! And then I keep seeing another picture! I keep seeing a picture of a man walking down a long corridor!

A man . . . stealing down a long, dark corridor of a gloomy, old, many-gabled house to an old fashioned kitchen . . . and pouring a glass of milk . . . and taking something from his pocket . . .



But I must not think of it! As I must not think of Cathy! I must forget! And yet, how can I help my thoughts? How can I forget Cathy? How can I forget Paul?

I do not grieve for Paul. Paul is at rest now. The horror he saw in that tomb that morning means nothing to Paul now.

But I? How will I forget? Dear Lord, How? How will I ease my soul?

How can I forget the *sleeping pills* I dropped into the warm milk I made for Paul that night?

How can I forget that it was *I* who chained Paul to his bed, while outside, in the cold damp darkness of the mausoleam, in her bronze coffin, Cathy struggled and struggled and struggled until she died.

THE END

THE BASKET

The man was whistling softly as he trudged along.

Somewhere in the pines, a jay-bird screamed. A toad, invisible against the dust-dry background of the rutted road, leaped from under his hobnailed shoe in the nick of time. It startled him.

He stopped for a moment to study it. The toad waited, frozen, like a stone. He nudged it with his toe. The toad shot into the hot summer air. Once. Twice. It was lost in the high grass at the edge of the road.

The man moved on, still whistling.

The jay-bird screamed again, closer this time. A flash of blue streaked from the pines ahead and disappeared into the oaks on the other side of the road.

He hesitated. Something had scared that jay-bird. His knuckles paled as he grasped the basket perched on his right shoulder. He stopped whistling.

The boy came out of the pine grove. He pushed through the grass to the road. His head was down so he did not see.

When he looked up, his eyes widened, and his face paled. He froze there, like the toad, staring at the man with the basket.

GRAHAM INGELS

Then the boy turned and ran. Not in fear. In a kind of throbbing excitement. He sprinted down the road, his bare toes catching up dust and throwing it back behind him in little yellow clouds.

"He's coming! He's coming again!" he cried as he neared a small group of boys huddled over an engrossing game of marbles. "Mr. Cabez is coming into town again."

Four wide-eyed expectant faces turned in the direction of the distant sound of whistling. They waited, with only the rasps of their excited breathing. Their game was forgotten.

He rounded the bend in the road and came into sight. The man.

"See? What did I tell you? He never goes anywhere without that basket!"

"Did you see him?" A freckled-faced boy got to his feet.

"He's up the road. Nearly scared me to death," the messenger gasped, breathlessly pointing in the direction from which he'd come.

"Has he got his basket with him?" Another boy stood up.

The boy on the ground took careful aim. "Did you ever see him *without* it?"

They whispered among themselves as the strange figure with the round wicker basket perched on his shoulder approached.

"Always carries it on his right shoulder, too!"

"He's crazy, that's what he is!"

"Sh-h-h! He'll hear you!"

The man stopped whistling and smiled as he came up to where the group of boys stood waiting.

"Hello, kids!" His voice was soft, with a trace of a sigh.

"Hello, Mr. Cabez!"

"Whatcha got in your basket this time, huh, Mr. Cabez?"

"Yeah, Mr. Cabez. Tell us!"

It was an old game the boys played every time Mr. Cabez came into town.

It was a game they played, yet the boys played it to the hilt, sounding as though they really believed. Mr. Cabez smiled, patted a shock of red hair, and continued on down the road to town, his whistling echoing back across the heavy summer air.

"Boy, he tells some tall tales!" said the freckled face one.

"Tetched in the haid, I say!" The red-head tapped his temple knowingly. "I never see him without that basket!"

"This time, kids," Mr. Cabez grinned down at the shining upturned faces around him and gripped the handle of the basket a little tighter, "this time my basket is filled with... with gold! Pirate gold! Pieces of eight! And Spanish doubloons! Part of a treasure I found buried in my cellar!"

"Really?" gasped the freckled-face boy.

"Golly!"

"Gee!"

The squealing screen door of the town General Store shrieked a warning as the man with the basket pulled it open. The laughter and the small talk of the men gathered around the cold pot-bellied stove died suddenly. There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Afternoon, Vincent!" The proprietor rose from his rocker. "Come in to order your vittles?"

"That's right, George! Got my list right here!" Mr. Cabez handed him a crumpled piece of paper.

"I'll drop this order by your place early this evenin', Vincent. I'll be passin' that way!" George studied the scrawled list.

Vincent Cabez nodded and turned to go. He looked over toward the silent men seated about the stove.

"Afternoon, Gentlemen!" he smiled.

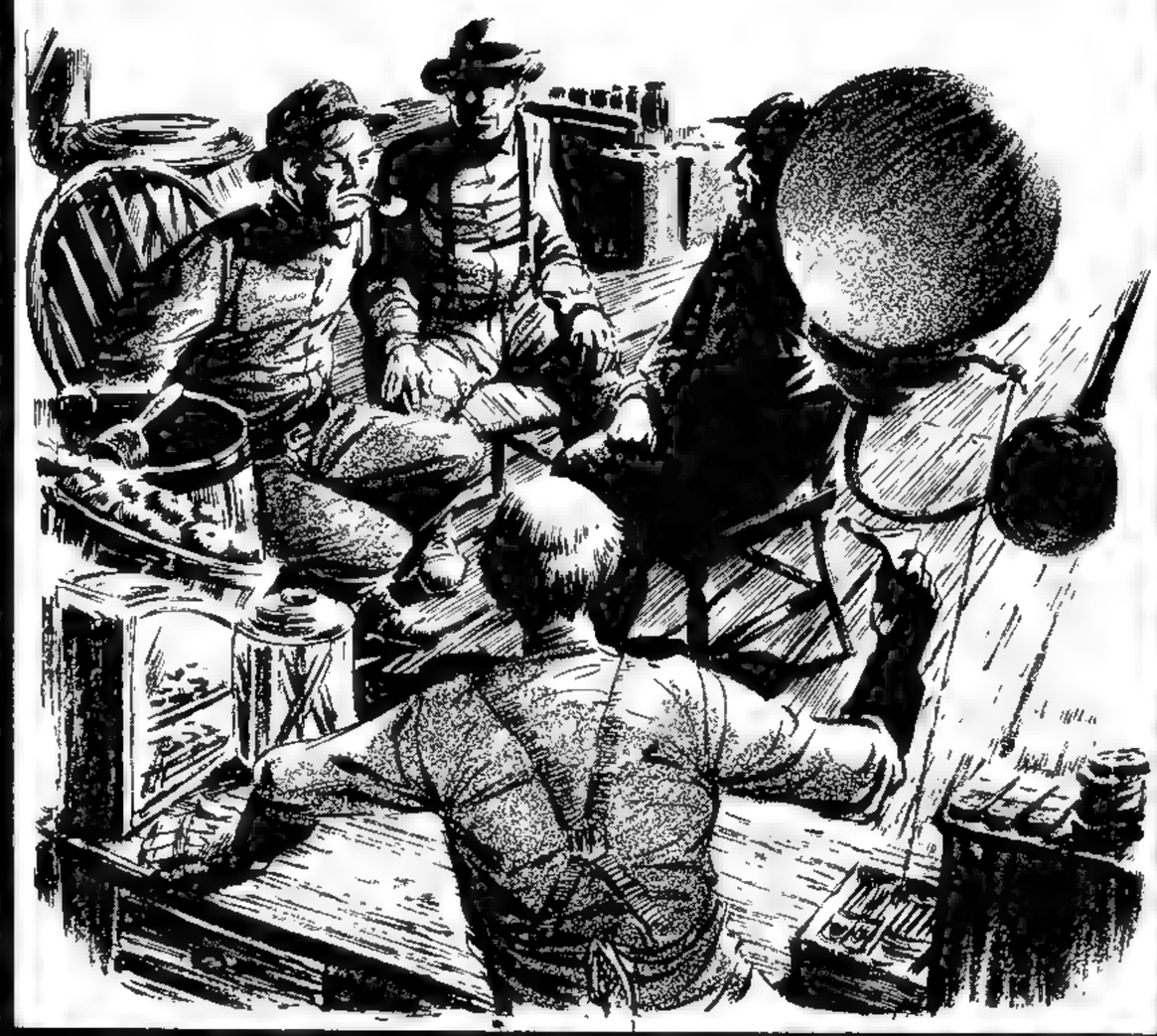
Old Clem stared at him. Zeb nodded coldly. Cal was the only one who spoke.

"Howdy, Cabez!" The minute he said it, he looked as if he were sorry.

"I wonder *why* he carries that basket around with him?" Cal scratched his two day growth of beard.

"He's crazy! That's why!" snapped Zeb. "Ain't I right, George? That Vincent Cabez is crazy?"

"You sure are, Zeb!" George leaned over the counter and waved the crumpled sheet of paper Cabez had given him. "See this? It's his vittles order! Comes in here once a week and leaves it. I deliver it to his place."



Vincent stood there for a moment, waiting . . . then shrugged and left. The slam of the screen door was the signal for the talk among the men to begin again.

"Tried to strike up a conversation, he did!" said Cal, reassuring the others of his feelings.

"Yuh don't catch me talkin' to no lunatic," Zeb growled.

"Crazy galoot," said Clem, shaking his head. "Always totin' that basket!"

"You know what I see every time I go there with his order? He answers the door carryin' that basket! Kin you imagine that? Carryin' that basket on his shoulder around his house, even?" George shook his head.

"He sure is loco," said Clem.

A week passed.

A heavy rain came over the hills and soaked the parched fields and the corn grew a whole foot in height.

And then, it was time for another trip to town for the man with the basket.

He came down the familiar road, plodding slowly, his feet dragging, as if the weight he was carrying was too much for one man to bear.

The small group of boys studied the man with the basket as he came near. There were dark shadows under his eyes and his face was drawn and pale. The lines around his mouth seemed deeper, somehow.

But, in spite of his fatigued appearance, Mr. Cabez stopped as usual and smiled down at the children around him.

"Hello, boys," he said. His voice was tired.

"Hi, Mr. Cabez."

" 'Lo, Mr. Cabez."

The kids were waiting at the bend near town as usual. But they heard no familiar whistling. The figure they saw approaching was not the familiar spry figure they had grown so accustomed to.

"Hey, look at Mr. Cabez," said the freckled-faced one. "He looks awful!"

"He's as white as a ghost! He must be sick!" The red-head seemed actually concerned.

"Must be gettin' tired of carryin' his basket!"

"Gee! Do you think we should kid him today?"

There was a moment of silence. Mr. Cabez forced a weak laugh.

"What's the matter with you kids today?" he asked. "Cat got your tongues? Isn't anybody goin' to ask me what I've got in my basket this time?"

"Gee, Mr. Cabez," blurted the freckled-faced one, "You don't look so good!"

"Ain't you feelin' well, Mr. Cabez?" The red-head moved toward him instinctively, then backed off. "Are you sick?"

Mr. Cabez was silent for a moment, then mumbled something about being all right, and moved off down the road toward the General Store.

The kids looked at each other.

"Gee, he got such a funny look when I asked him if he was feelin' well," said the red-head.

"He *must* be sick!" said the freckled-faced one.

"Gee, maybe he's gonna *die!*"

The usual silence greeted Vincent Cabez as he entered the General Store. He looked around at the cold faces gathered at the stove and plodded to the counter.

"Here's my list, George!" He said it as if it were the last time.

"Say! You sick, Cabez?" George studied him. "You look pretty bad!"

"I feel pretty bad," said Cabez. "I was plannin' on stoppin' by at Doc Hawkins'."

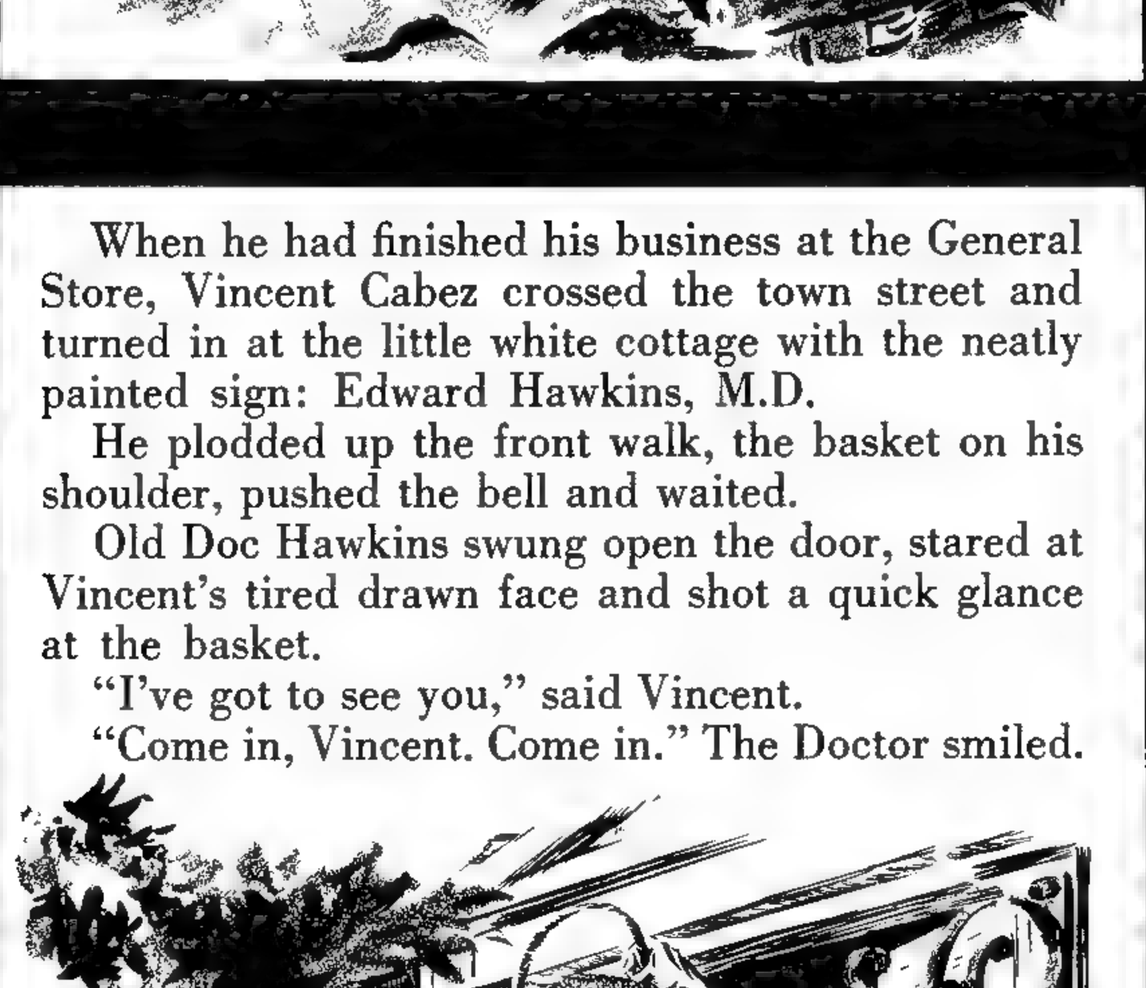
"You'd better," said George.

An eager look came over the red-head's face.

"If he *does* die, maybe we'll all find out what he's *really* got in that basket!"

"Aw, cut it out! That ain't funny!" said the one with the freckles.

"Yeah! The poor guy! He can't help it if he's got a phobia or somethin'! Maybe he don't trust anybody and he carries his money *with* him 'stead of puttin' it in the bank like other folks!"



When he had finished his business at the General Store, Vincent Cabez crossed the town street and turned in at the little white cottage with the neatly painted sign: Edward Hawkins, M.D.

He plodded up the front walk, the basket on his shoulder, pushed the bell and waited.

Old Doc Hawkins swung open the door, stared at Vincent's tired drawn face and shot a quick glance at the basket.

"I've got to see you," said Vincent.

"Come in, Vincent. Come in." The Doctor smiled.

Another week went by.

There was no rain and the corn withered. The fields dried and coughed dust to the summer winds.

It was time again for another trip to town.

The boys waited at the bend in the road.

"Hey! Look! Here comes Mr. Cabez!"

"He . . . he looks different," said the freckled one.

"He ain't pale no more," said the red-head.

"Gee! He's all better! He ain't gonna die after all!"

The look of fatigue was gone. The plodding step was gone. The dark patches under his eyes were gone. Instead, Mr. Cabez's eyes flamed.

The boys gathered around him as he approached . . . smiling . . . chattering . . . pulling at his clothes.

"Hi, Mr. Cabez!"

"What's in the basket today, Mr. Cabez?"

"Yeah. Tell us, Mr. Cabez!"

"Out of my way . . . Brats!"

Mr. Cabez snarled. He swung viciously, slapping the red-head across the mouth.

The other boys just stared, too stunned to move.

Mr. Cabez cursed the child lying on the ground and strode off down the road.

"He . . . he hit me!" The red-head got to his feet and began to cry.

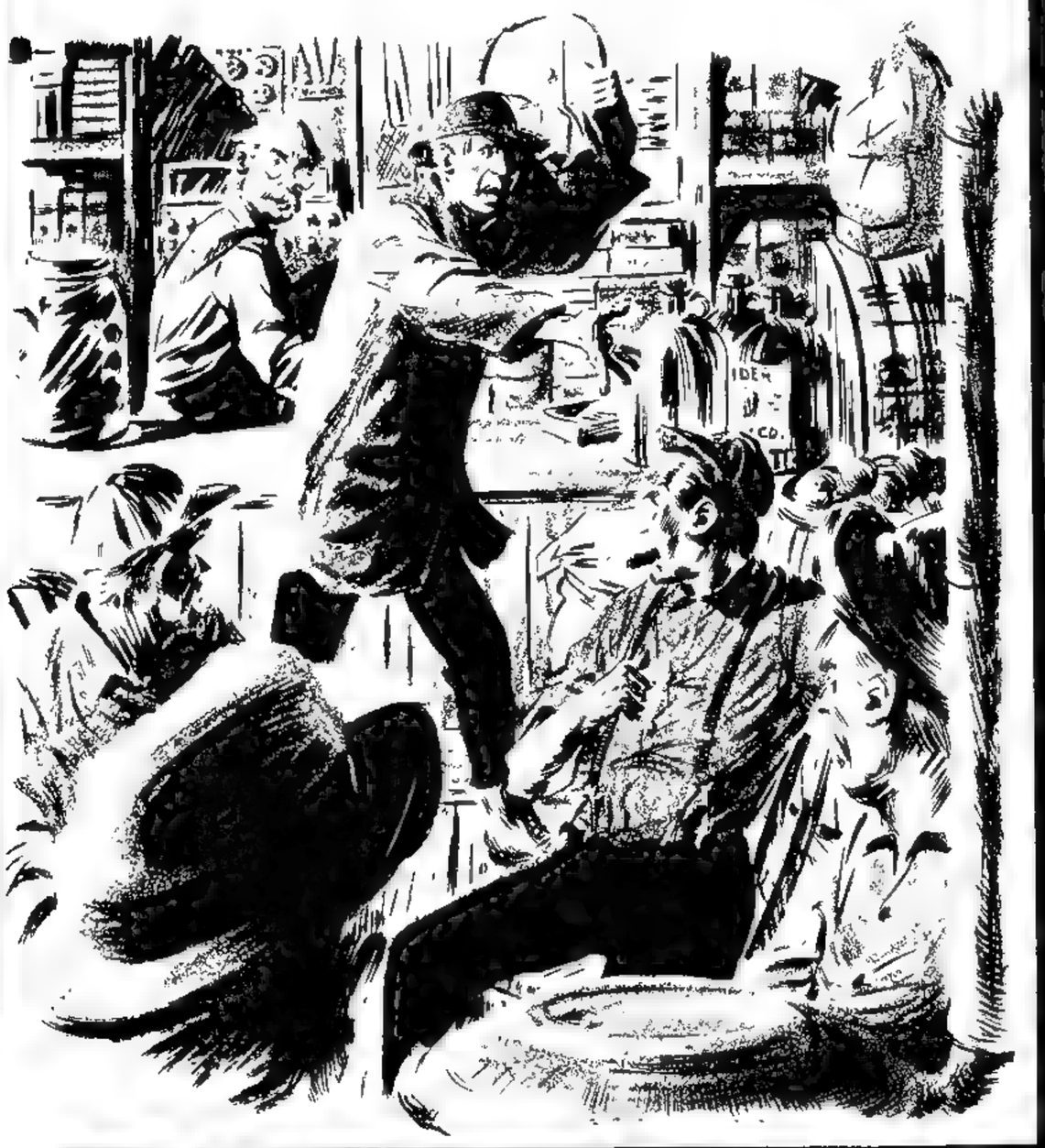
"Did you see his eyes? Did you see the look in his eyes?"

"I'm gonna tell my ol' man about this, that's what I'm gonna do!"

"I *knew* he looked different," said the freckled-faced one. He studied the figure moving down the road in a cloud of dust. "He's carrying his basket on his *left* shoulder!"

In the General Store, Cabez flung his vittles list to the counter and turned to face the silent men around the stove. His eyes blazed and his mouth twisted into an angry scowl.

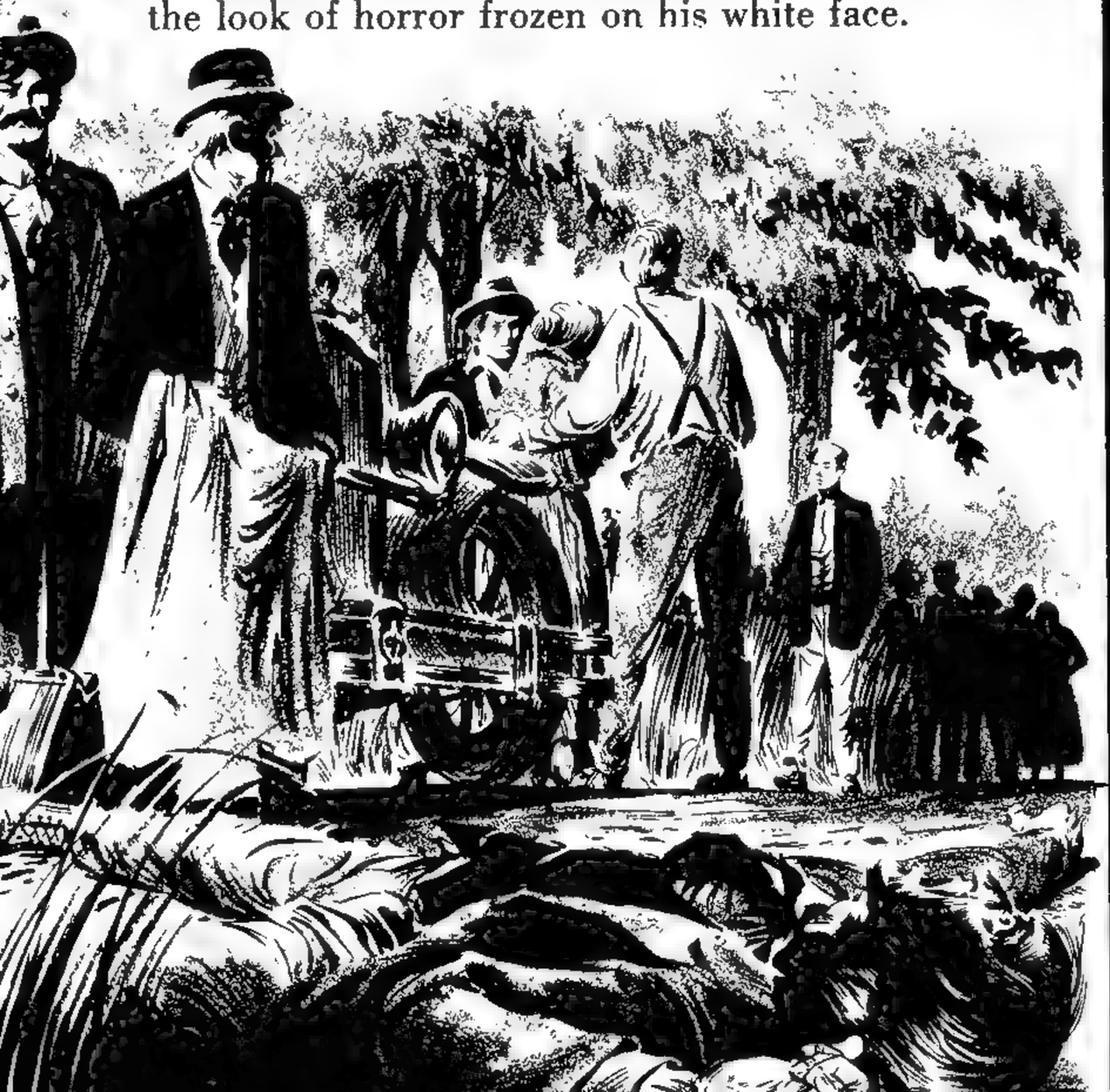
"What's wrong? Am I poison or something? Why doesn't someone say something? What are you all so quiet about?" he shouted at them suddenly.



"You all hate me, don't you? You think I'm crazy, don't you? Just because I go around carryin' this basket! Well, I'm good as any one o' you! Twice as good! You'll be sorry 'bout the way you treat me! Each an' every one o' you! You'll be sorry! You'll see! I'll show you!"

"You'd better get out of here, Cabez, before you start trouble," said George quietly.

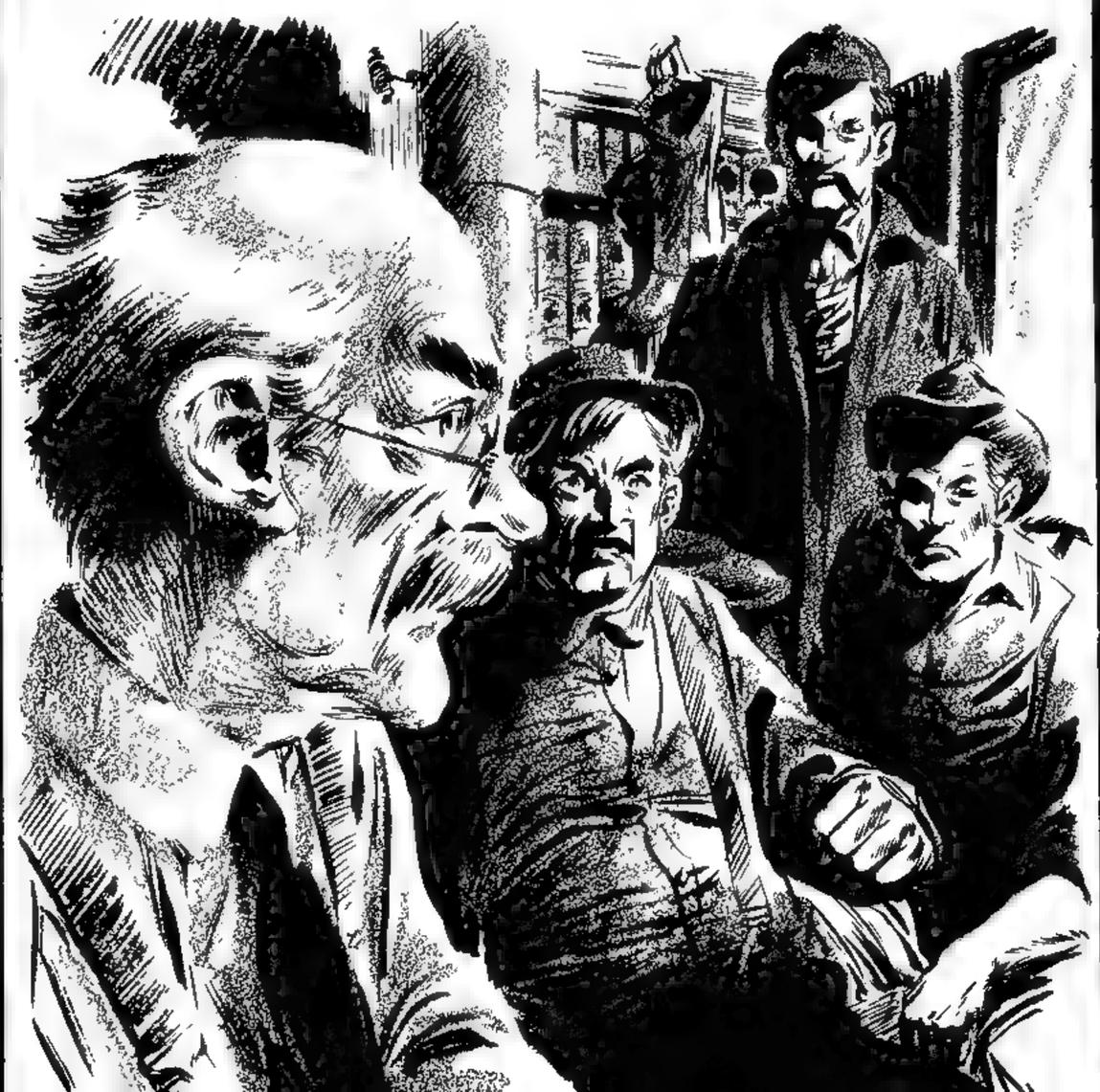
They found Zeb Miller's body the next morning. He'd not come home from the Grange meeting the previous night and his wife had gone into town, looking for him. She'd found his body in the road, the dry dust soaking up his blood. And she'd seen the look of horror frozen on his white face.



The men sat around the pot-bellied stove and whispered.

"It was Cabez! I'll bet my bottom dollar," said Clem. "He seemed worse than he's ever been yesterday. Ain't I right, George?"

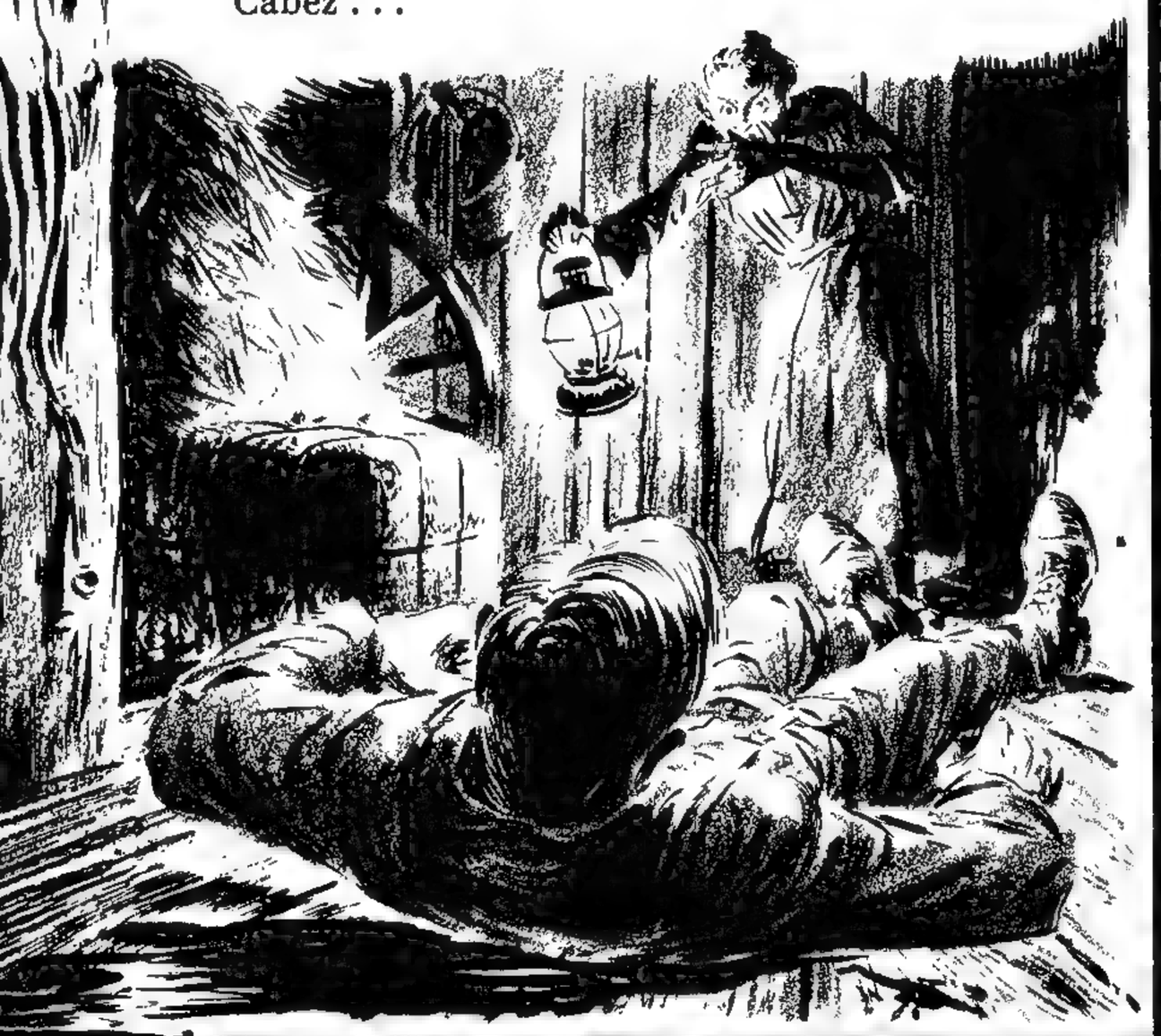
"You're right, Clem," said George. "But you can't go around accusin' a man of murder without proof!"



That night, they got their proof.

Clem's wife heard his hoarse cry echo across the barnyard. By the time she got to him, he was on the floor of the barn, his eyes bulging, staring past her at some indescribable horror he'd seen. His blood pooled out on the barn floor from the grinning slit in his throat. He whispered just one bubbling word before he died.

"Cabez . . ."



"All right," screamed Cal Farnsworth. "Let's go get the dirty murderin' b . . ." His words were drowned out by the frenzied cheer of the angry mob.

"Let's go! Let's lynch 'im!"

They moved off, up the main street, shouting and spitting and brandishing their weapons, feeling the pulsating beat of the murder in their hearts.

The lights in town blazed. Burning torches danced in the street. The word had spread like wildfire.

They came with their pitchforks and scythes and rifles. With axes and rope and lengths of lead pipe. They poured into town with curses on their lips and the taste of blood on their dry tongues.

Old Doc Hawkins burst into the sheriff's office. The man with the star looked up from his paper.

"Aren't you going to try to stop them?" the Doc screamed. The sheriff shrugged. "They're going up to lynch Vincent Cabez! It's your duty to stop . . ."

"I'm only one man, Doc," the sheriff snapped. "What can one man do against a mob?"

"But you can't let them lynch him! They'd be killing an innocent man!" The Doc's voice shook with emotion.

The sheriff stood up and crossed to the window to watch the last of the flickering torches disappear out of town.

"Ol' Clem's dyin' words accused Cabez! That sure don't make him anythin' but guilty to me," he said.

"But there are *two* Vincent Cabezes!" said the Doc. "And one of them is innocent!"

"Two Vincent Cabezes!" The sheriff turned and stared at the old Doctor. "What in blazes are you talking about?"

"Vincent Cabez," said Doc Hawkins quietly, "was born with *two heads!*

It was silent in the sheriff's office.

The din of the lynch mob had faded around the bend in the road leading from town, and the only sound was the heavy breathing of the two men facing each other in the silence.

"Two heads . . ." the sheriff hissed.

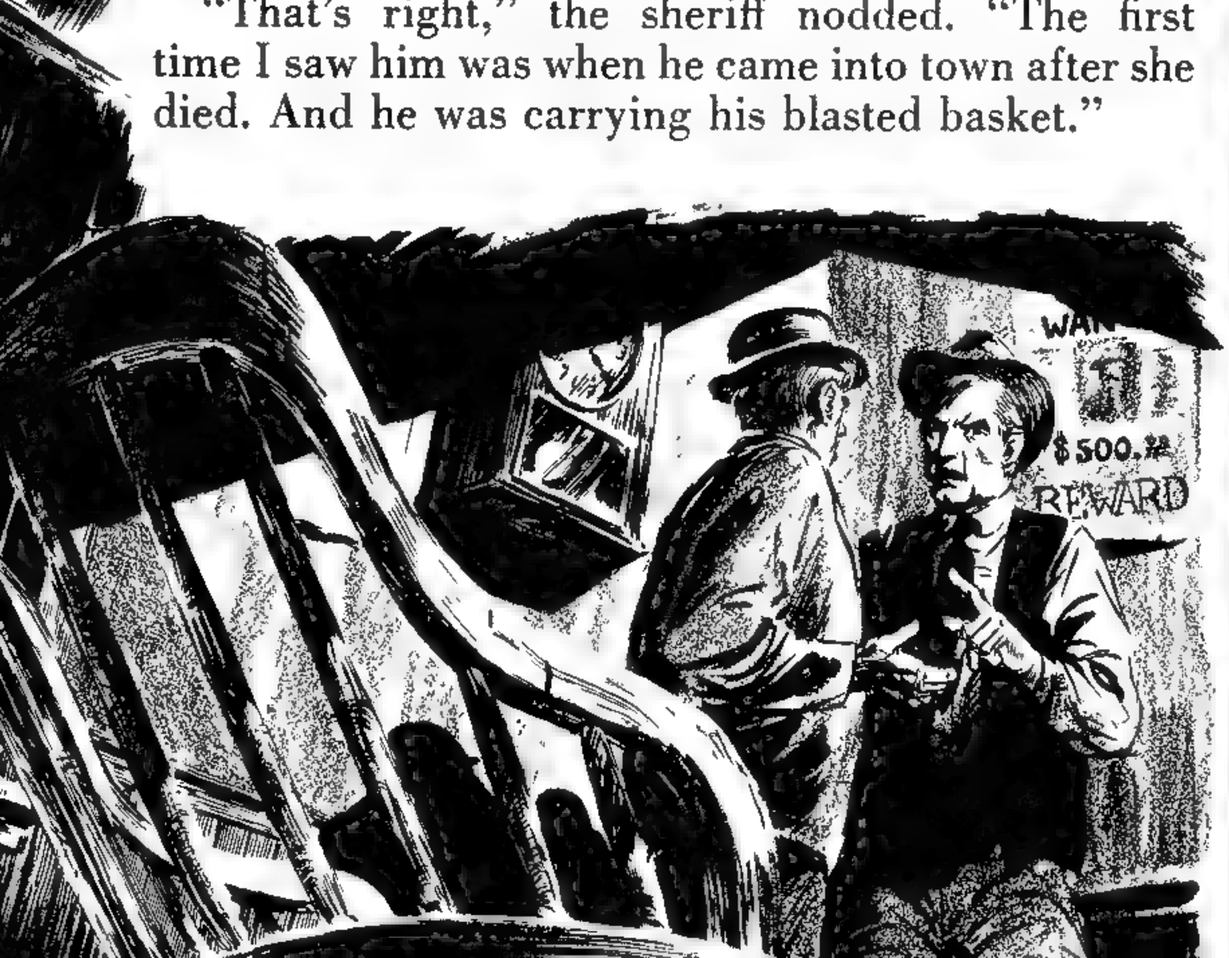
"That's right," said the Doc. "I delivered him myself. His folks have long since moved away so I needn't tell you who they were.

"When I told his mother, she refused to accept him. She became hysterical when she saw the baby and screamed that I should do away with him.

"Then, Martha Cabez, the mid-wife that helped me deliver him, volunteered to take him. She was childless herself, and lonely. She begged me not to kill him but to let her have him for as long as he might live. I consented, after first warning her that she would have to guard her secret."

"Vincent Cabez grew up under Martha's loving and gentle care. And she guarded her secret well. No one ever saw the child until he'd grown to manhood."

"That's right," the sheriff nodded. "The first time I saw him was when he came into town after she died. And he was carrying his blasted basket."



"That was my idea," smiled the Doc. "After his mother's death, Vincent was on his own. A plan had to be devised whereby he could move about the town streets without causing panic. The basket idea was the only solution."

"Vincent had always been able to completely control his other head," the Doc went on. "He was a good man . . . Vincent. But, his other head . . . well, there was something evil about it.

"They say a man has both good and evil in him, and the good is constantly fighting the evil. That's the way it was with Vincent. It was as though all of the evil in him was concentrated in the brain of his right head. And he constantly had to fight it. I always considered Vincent, the real Vincent, as being the left head."

"And that's why the basket always covered the right head," said the sheriff.

"Exactly," nodded the Doc. "Until recently! Two weeks ago, Vincent stopped by to see me. His face was drawn and tired, his eyes bloodshot with dark circles below them. It was obvious what was happening. The right head was trying to take over his body! He hadn't slept in four nights!"

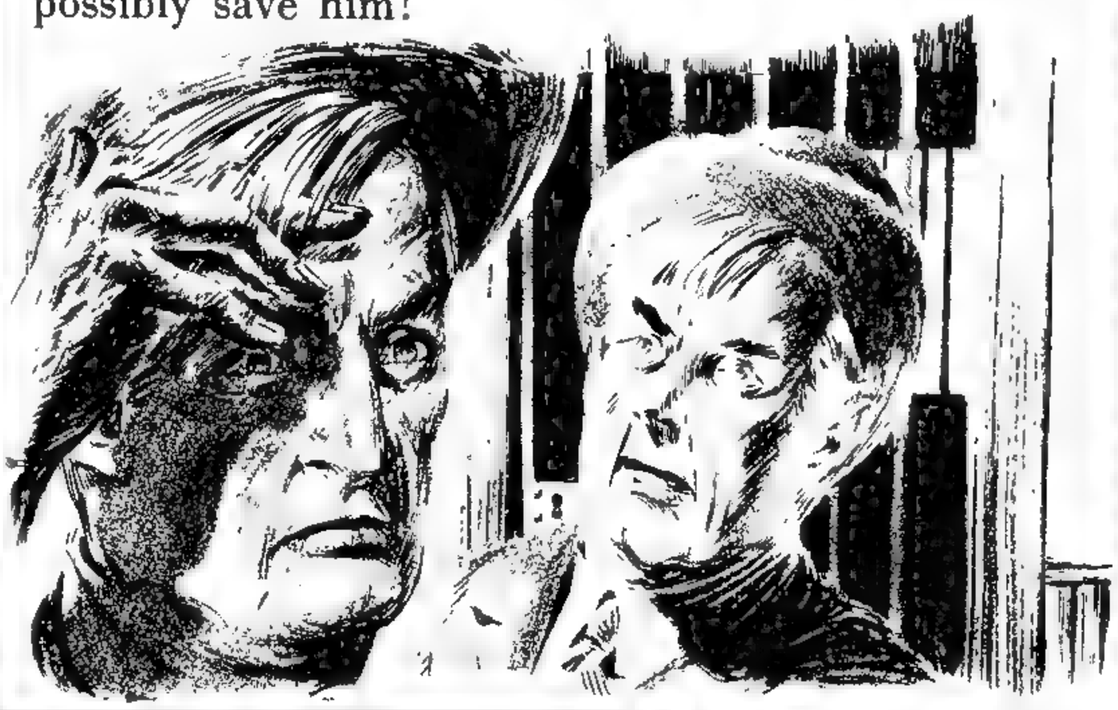
"There was nothing I could do, except urge Vincent to fight it. And you know what happened. His other head won out. When he came into town this last time, his other head was in control. His evil head!"

"That explains his ornery behavior," mused the sheriff, "his hittin' Luke Fenwick's kid . . . and then the murders."

"Vincent's other head is the real criminal," the Doc cried. "The other head is the evil-doer!"

"And you can't kill it without killing Vincent!" old Doc Hawkins concluded.

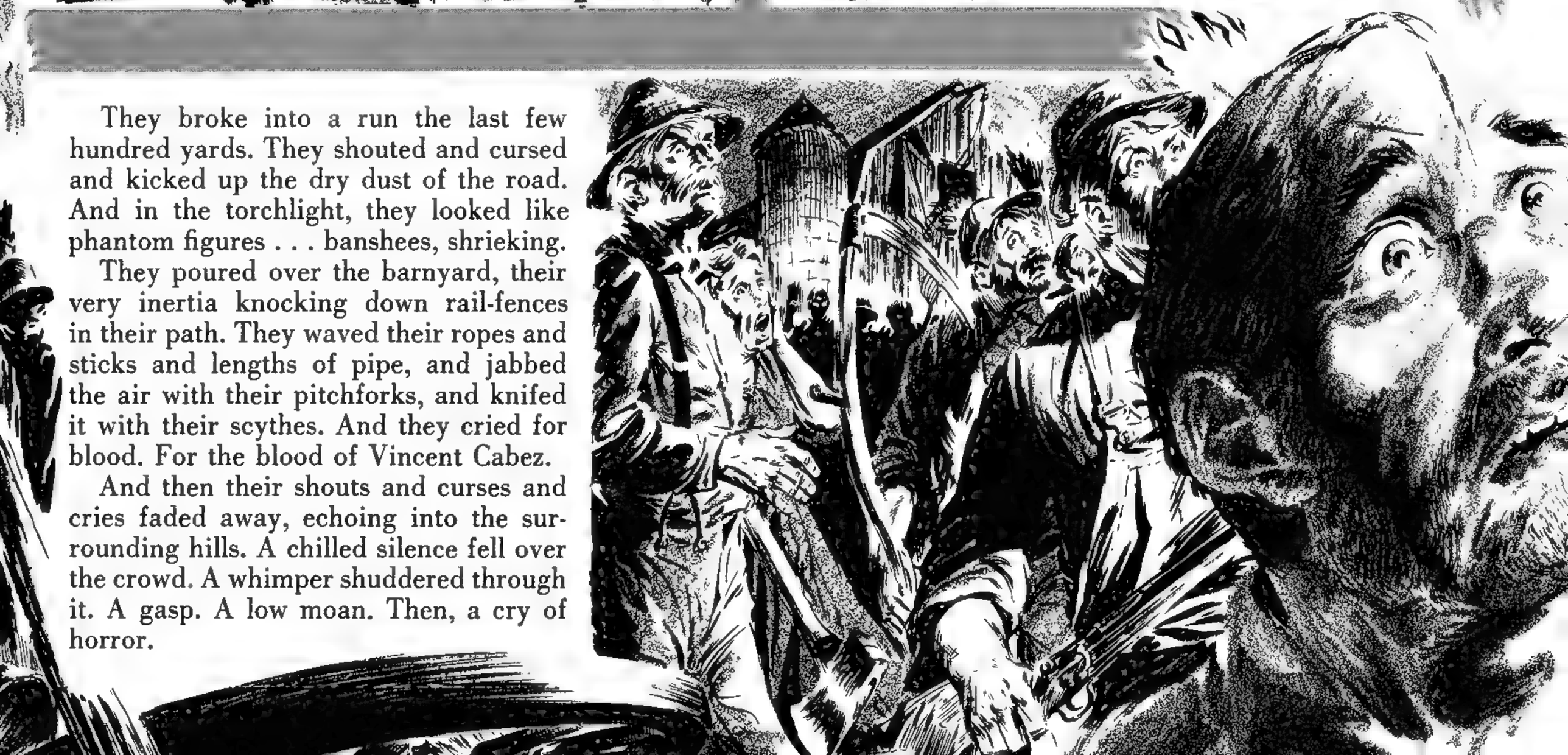
"What'll we do?" the sheriff shook his head. "That lynch crowd must be there by now! We can't possibly save him!"



They broke into a run the last few hundred yards. They shouted and cursed and kicked up the dry dust of the road. And in the torchlight, they looked like phantom figures . . . banshees, shrieking.

They poured over the barnyard, their very inertia knocking down rail-fences in their path. They waved their ropes and sticks and lengths of pipe, and jabbed the air with their pitchforks, and knifed it with their scythes. And they cried for blood. For the blood of Vincent Cabez.

And then their shouts and curses and cries faded away, echoing into the surrounding hills. A chilled silence fell over the crowd. A whimper shuddered through it. A gasp. A low moan. Then, a cry of horror.



Vincent Cabez stood in the doorway.

"Good Lord! He's got two heads!" somebody cried.

"The basket! That's why he carried the basket!"

Nobody moved.

Vincent Cabez's right head glared. "What do you want? What are you all doing here?"

And Vincent Cabez's left head looked pleadingly at the gathered men. "Kill us! Please! For God's sake, kill us! I can't fight him any longer!"

The figure in the doorway seemed to shudder.

Then it pitched forward, charging the horror-struck mob.

"If none of you will kill us," said the left head determinedly, "I will!"

"No! No! Stop, you idiot! Stop!" The right head shrieked in fear.

Vincent Cabez snatched a rifle from a cringing man in the front of the crowd.

The lynching party stood frozen, each man rooted to the ground by the horror before their eyes.

"Kill us! Please!" The left head screamed.

"Shut up! You fool! Shut up!" There was fear in the eyes of the right head now.

"He's evil! He's evil and I can't fight him any more! Kill him! Kill me! Kill us both!" The left head looked at the men and saw that no one moved.

Two shots rang out.

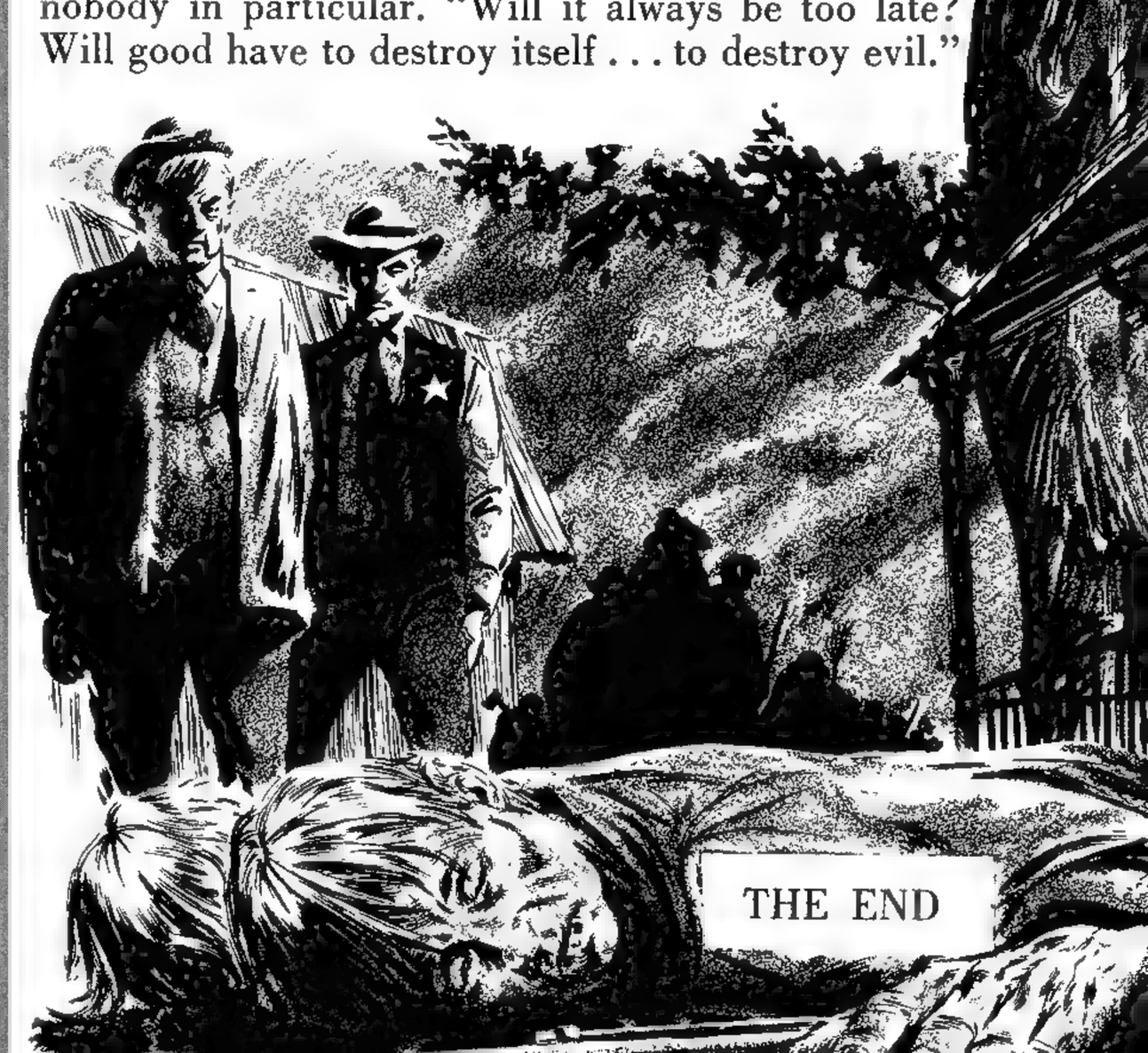
The staccatto reports echoed and re-echoed into the night, like phantom applause.

The two-headed body of Vincent Cabez sprawled in the mud of the barnyard. Dead.

The crowd moved off, sick . . . ashamed . . .

The old Doc stood beside the body. The sheriff shrugged. "We were too late!"

"Is this the way it'll be?" whispered the Doc to nobody in particular. "Will it always be too late? Will good have to destroy itself . . . to destroy evil."



The Gorilla's Paw

Floyd stood outside the curio shop window, gazing in at the weird assortment of objects that crowded every available inch of display space.

There was a dust-covered bust of Mozart, a chipped-gold statue of Buddah, a rusted helmet, a carved ivory pipe . . .

Floyd shook his head. He wondered idly what kind of people would spend good money on such useless junk.

Then, slowly, as his glance moved from one article to the next, Floyd began to feel uneasy. It wasn't the curios that were frightening. It was something else. Something about this dirty old store-window with its ancient relics that made a chill run up his spine. He looked up suddenly and caught his breath.

Behind the window display stood the shop-keeper, staring at him with small, wrinkled, beady eyes.

"What's the old buzzard gawking at me for?" Floyd said to himself. "Do I look like I'd be crazy enough to buy some of his junk?"

The old man crooked a gnarled finger at Floyd and motioned for him to enter the curio shop.

The foul odor of staleness and musty decay seared Floyd's nostrils. He looked about the dark, dusty interior of the curio shop.

"Listen, mister," he said, bruskly, "I'm not in the market for any of this . . . stuff. You got the wrong boy . . ."

"But I have something I think you'll want," said the shopkeeper cryptically.

At first, Floyd was tempted to turn away and ignore the invitation, but the look on the old man's face was one of grim concern. So, Floyd shrugged and entered the shop. As he opened the door, a bell tinkled somewhere in the rear.

"Come in, young man," the shopkeeper said, gleefully. "Come in!"

The old man scurried behind the counter and opened a drawer. From it, he lifted a small wooden case and placed it carefully upon the dusty countertop.

Floyd turned to go. "Not me, old timer! I can think of lots better ways to spend my dough . . ."

"Wait!" The old man almost screamed it. "Just look at it, that's all I ask! Just look at it!"

Floyd hesitated, then shrugged. "Okay, I'll look at it," he snapped. "But make it quick!"

The gnarled old shopkeeper took a small rusted key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock set in the lid of the small oak chest.

The lid opened, squealing as if in warning.

"Good Lord!" Floyd choked out the words.

Floyd shuddered as he studied the wrinkled, black-skinned, hairy paw. There was a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach. A chill went up his spine. He laughed out loud, as if to chase the sudden fear that gripped him.

"Hah! And what in blue blazes would I want with a disgusting-looking, mummified gorilla's paw?"

"That would be up to you," the shopkeeper said.

He stepped back in dismay as the fetid odor of decay swept up from the open box as if happy to be free. The old curio dealer reached in and lifted the hideous thing from the moth-eaten velvet lining.

"What . . . What is it?" Floyd gagged.

"It's a mummified gorilla's paw, my friend," the shopkeeper's voice was eager now. "A rare specimen! A collector's item! I'll sell it cheap . . ."

"If you want to buy it," the old man added, "It's twenty-five dollars. Without the chest, that is! The chest is extra!"

Floyd shook his head and started for the door. "Twenty-five bucks . . . for that monstrosity? Not me, Pops! Find yourself another sucker! I'm goin' . . ."

The old man held the paw and stared at Floyd.

"I wish you'd buy it," he murmured.

Floyd stopped, his hand on the doorknob. The old man. He suddenly felt sorry for the old man. Or was it the paw? What was it that fascinated him about that ugly, dried-up paw? He turned back. He walked to the counter slowly. The old man smiled.

"Let's see the filthy thing," he held out his hand.

Floyd reached into his pocket and withdrew the pay envelope he'd collected just that day. He counted out twenty-five dollars.

"The chest!" The old man had forgotten about it. "What about the chest? You'll want that, too! I'll let it go cheap! Only five dollars . . ."

Floyd shook his head. He held up the paw. "This is all I want," he said, smiling.

The old man placed the hairy, dried extremity in Floyd's outstretched hand. Floyd stared down at it. There was no feeling of fear now. It was gone . . . replaced by a strange fascination for the gnarled, hairy thing he held.

"Twenty-five bucks, eh?"

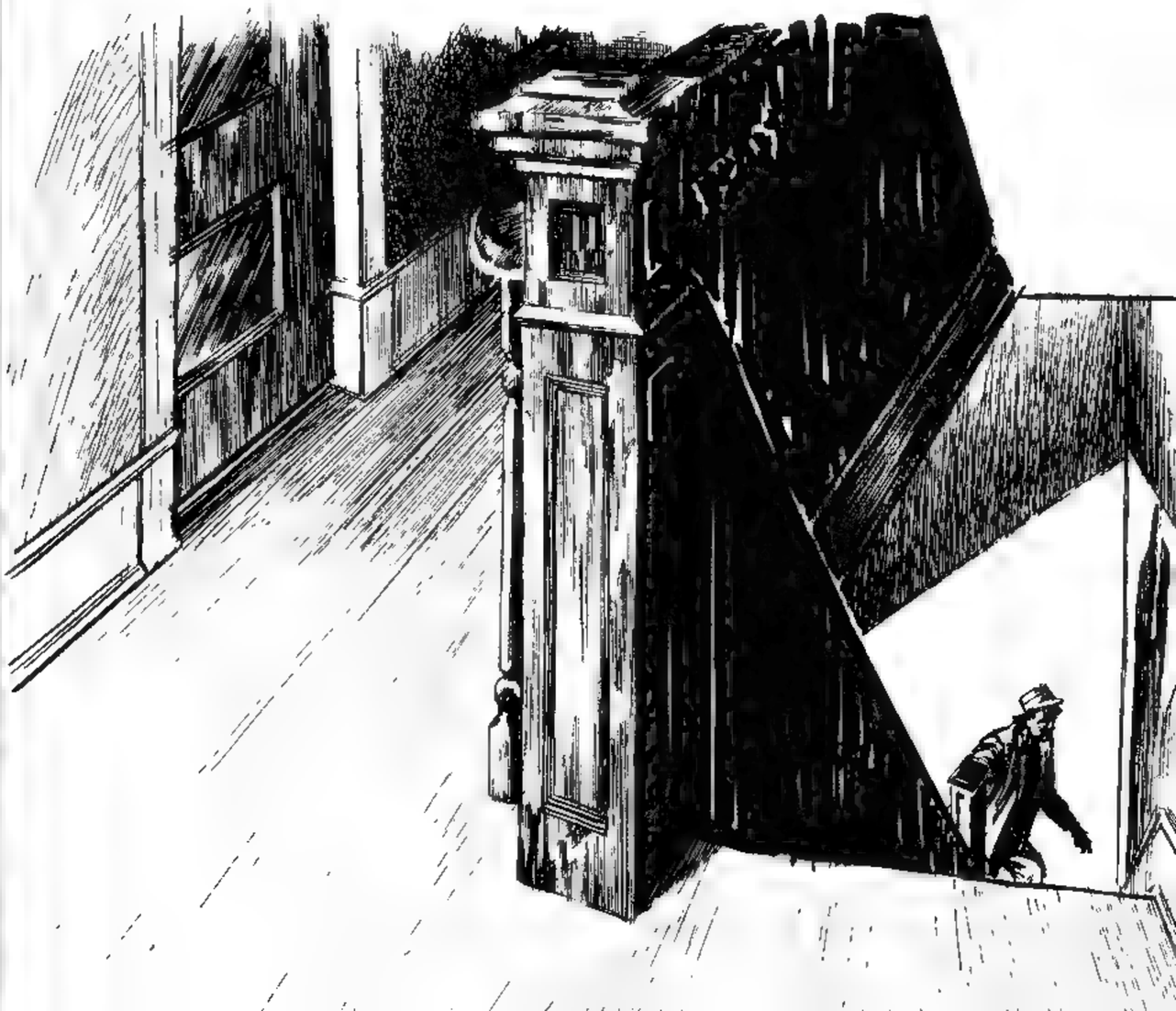
"Then you'll take it?" The shopkeeper cried.

"I'll take it," said Floyd. "I . . . I kinda like it. There's something about it . . ."

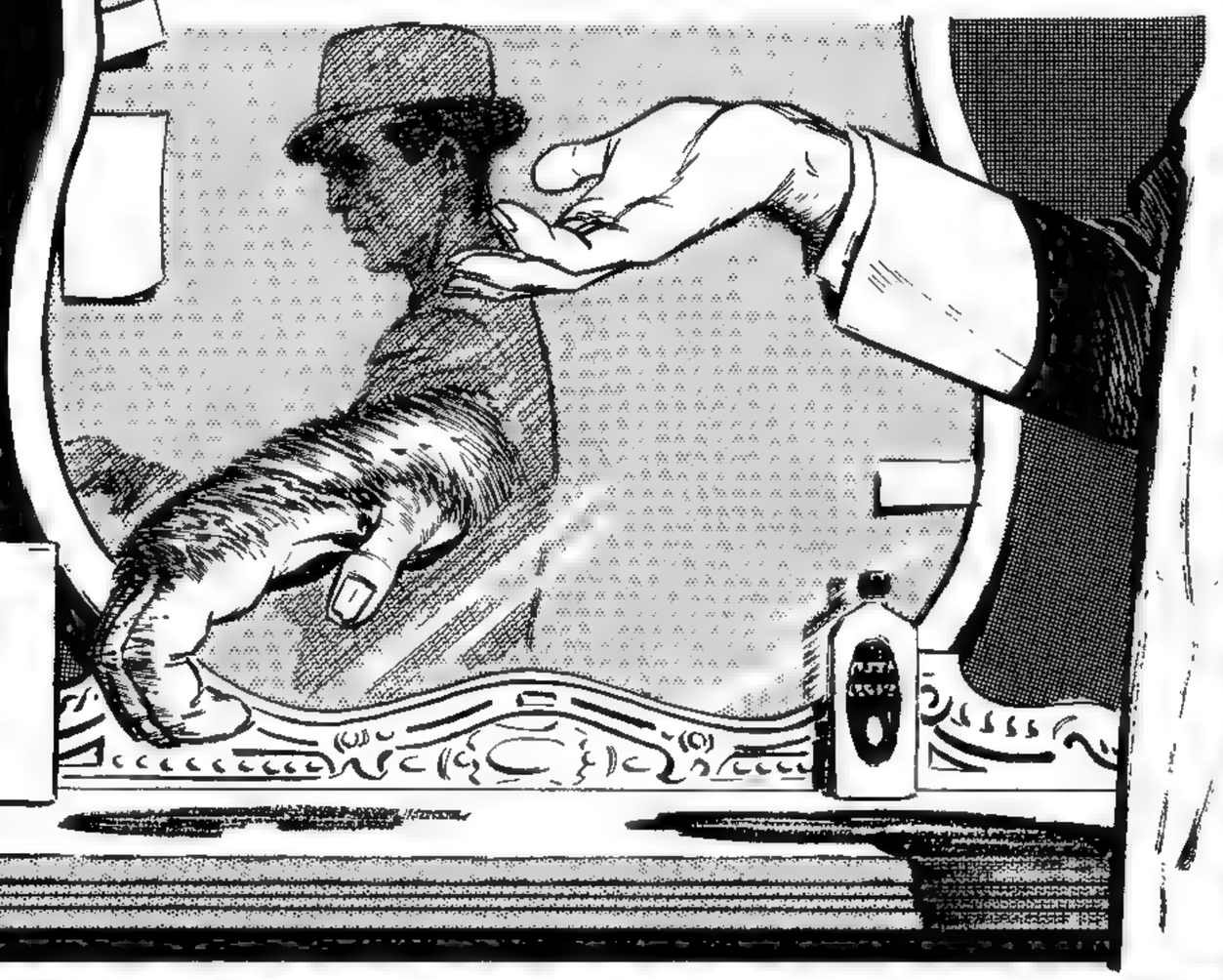
He pocketed the mummified gorilla's paw and left the shop. He made his way down the street as if in a dream. He felt a weird kind of satisfaction, as though a great need had been satisfied.

Soon, Floyd arrived at the run-down tenement where he lived. The walk in the evening air had cleared his head. His perspective had returned.

"I must have been crazy," he said to himself as he climbed the rickety steps.



He flung open the door to his shabby flat and cursed. "I don't know what got into me!" He withdrew the dried-up paw from his pocket and examined it critically. "Twenty-five bucks for this . . . this piece of junk! I must have been crazy! Half my pay, shot!" He tossed the thing on the dresser, disgusted with himself.



He undressed slowly, musing to himself, half-aloud. "Why did I do it? I must have felt sorry for the old coot! A sucker, that's what I am! A sucker! I didn't want the thing! I didn't! But I listened to his sob story and I bought it! For twenty-five bucks! Now I wish I hadn't!"

He turned out the light and lay in the darkness, listening to the street noises below.

Floyd slept fitfully that night. He was angry, and his anger haunted his dreams. He saw the old man in pain, screaming, and he felt revenged.

He was awakened once during the night by a soft scratching sound. He opened his eyes, waiting. The sound was not repeated. "Probably a stray cat," he reasoned and turned over and went back to sleep.

In the morning, when he awoke, the first thing he saw was the gorilla's paw . . . and the money.

He leaped out of bed and stumbled to the dresser. The paw was there where he'd left it the night before. But under it was a sheaf of green bills.

He counted them. There was twenty-five dollars in ones and fives.

He counted them again to make sure.

He stared at the money, and then at the dried-up mummified limb.

"Of course," he laughed.

He checked his pay envelope. It was still in his pocket. And the balance of his pay was there too. He hadn't taken it out and placed it under the paw after all! A cold uneasiness crept over him.

"Cripes," he said to himself. "*I* didn't put the dough there! I wonder where it came from?"

He dressed slowly, not bothering to shave. It was Saturday, and there was no need.

He had a small breakfast in a local diner and made his way to his favorite off-day hangout. Nick's poolroom. Eddie and Joe were there when he arrived. He decided not to tell his friends about his latest purchase for fear of being ribbed.

And in the excitement of a hot game of snooker, he forgot about the twenty-five dollars.

"I'm hungry," Joe said after his shot.

"You're always hungry," said Floyd, chalking his cue.

"Let's eat!" Joe chose to ignore Floyd's remark.

"*I'm* not hungry," said Eddie.

"Neither am I," said Floyd. He missed his shot.

"Well, I am," smiled Joe, glancing out of the poolroom window. "And there's the answer to my prayers!" He nodded toward the umbrella-covered pushcart at the curb.

Joe racked his cue and headed for the door.

"I'm gonna get me a couple of hotdogs. You guys want one?" he called back.

"Not from *that* guy, Joe!" Floyd glanced out at the pushcart. "Those dogs he sells are made of junk! You'll get sick. Better not . . ."

But Joe was out of earshot, his mouth watering.

Floyd and Eddie waited patiently as Joe sated his appetite with four hotdogs of questionable quality, washed down by some equally questionable lemonade. Then they resumed their game.

An hour later, Joe was doubled up with pain.

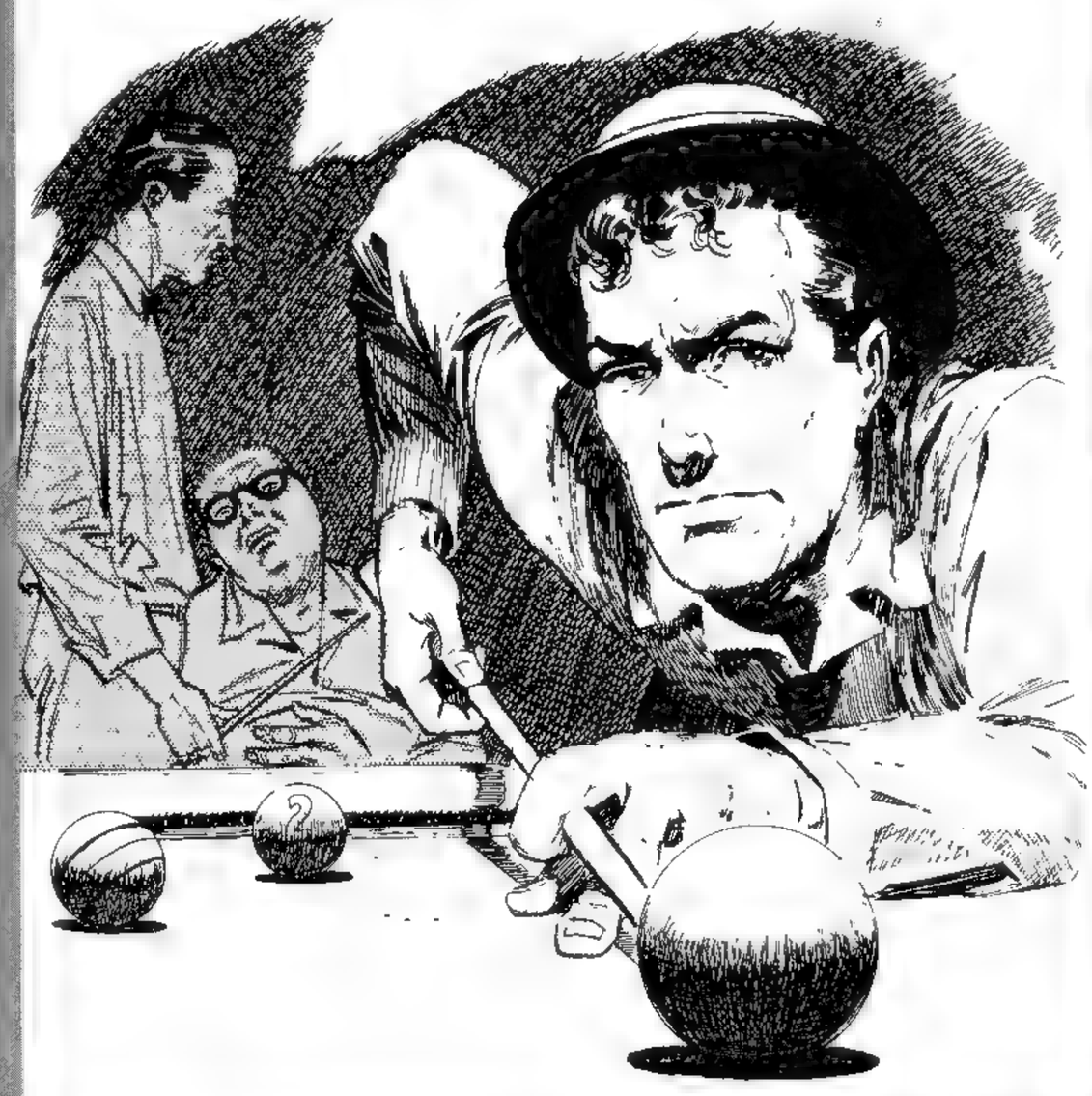
"I don't feel so good," he moaned. "Those dogs didn't agree with my stomach!"

"Your stomach," Floyd sneered. "You see? You wouldn't listen to me! I told you they were junk!"

"I was hungry," Joe wailed.

"You're always hungry," snapped Floyd. "You're always stuffing that stomach of yours. I wish you didn't have a stomach. Then you wouldn't be hungry all the time and we could play!"

He sunk the eight ball in the corner pocket.



That night, when Floyd returned to his room, he had a feeling that something was wrong. Something was different. As he undressed, his glance fell upon the dresser.

"The gorilla paw," he gasped. "It's gone!" He looked around his room. There was no sign of the mummified limb. "Somebody swiped it," he concluded.

He climbed into bed, puzzled. "There sure are some crazy things happening to me lately," he mumbled. "First, I buy a piece of junk I don't want for twenty-five bucks. Then I get my dough back. And now, the blasted thing is stolen. Well, good riddance, I say!" He turned over and closed his eyes.

Floyd slept fitfully again that night. Again, he was troubled by nightmares. He kept seeing Joe, stuffing himself with hotdogs. Then, the scene would fade and he'd see Joe writhing on the floor, shrieking in pain.

In the morning, when he awoke, the gorilla paw was back on the dresser.

Floyd got out of bed and sleepily picked up the mummified limb. He studied it, turning it over and over. It was covered with muddy brown stains.

Suddenly, there was a frantic pounding on the door. "Open up, Floyd! It's me! Eddie! Quick!" The voice outside was as frantic as the pounding.

"Just a minute, Eddie," Floyd called, slipping the paw into the top drawer of the dresser.

Floyd opened the door. Eddie pushed by him, white as a sheet.

"What's up, Eddie? You look as though you've seen a ghost!"

"They found Joe in his room this morning, Floyd! He's dead! Joe's dead! It was awful! Awful . . ."

Floyd closed the door. He felt himself beginning to tremble. "What happened to him, Eddie? Tell me! What happened to Joe?" He almost knew the answer.

"I saw him before they took him away," whispered Eddie. "I saw him . . ."

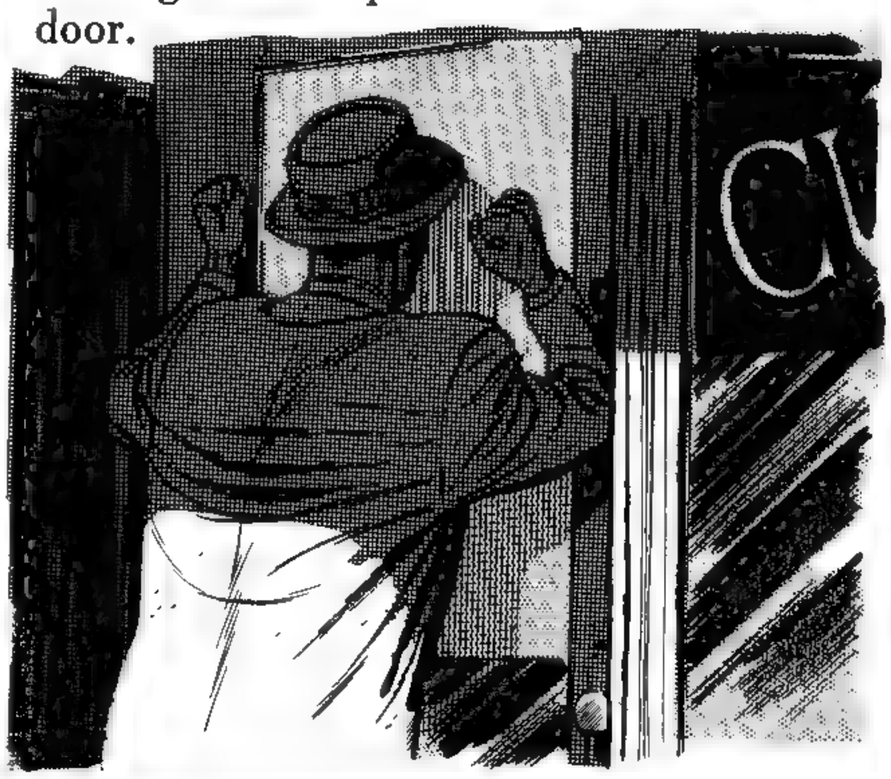
"It was like he'd been attacked by some wild animal," Eddie went on. "His belly was ripped open . . . and his guts . . . were . . ."

He coughed and hurried into the bathroom.

Floyd turned to the dresser, shaking.

He slid open the top drawer and stared down at the stained paw lying on his shirts. A wave of horror swept over him. "Eddie," he whispered. "Eddie, you remember yesterday . . . when I wished Joe didn't . . . didn't have a stomach . . . so he wouldn't be hungry all the time . . . ?"

That night, Floyd put the mummified gorilla paw in his pocket and went uptown to the curio shop. When he got there, it was dark. "Sunday," he cursed. "I forgot!" He pounded on the shaded door.



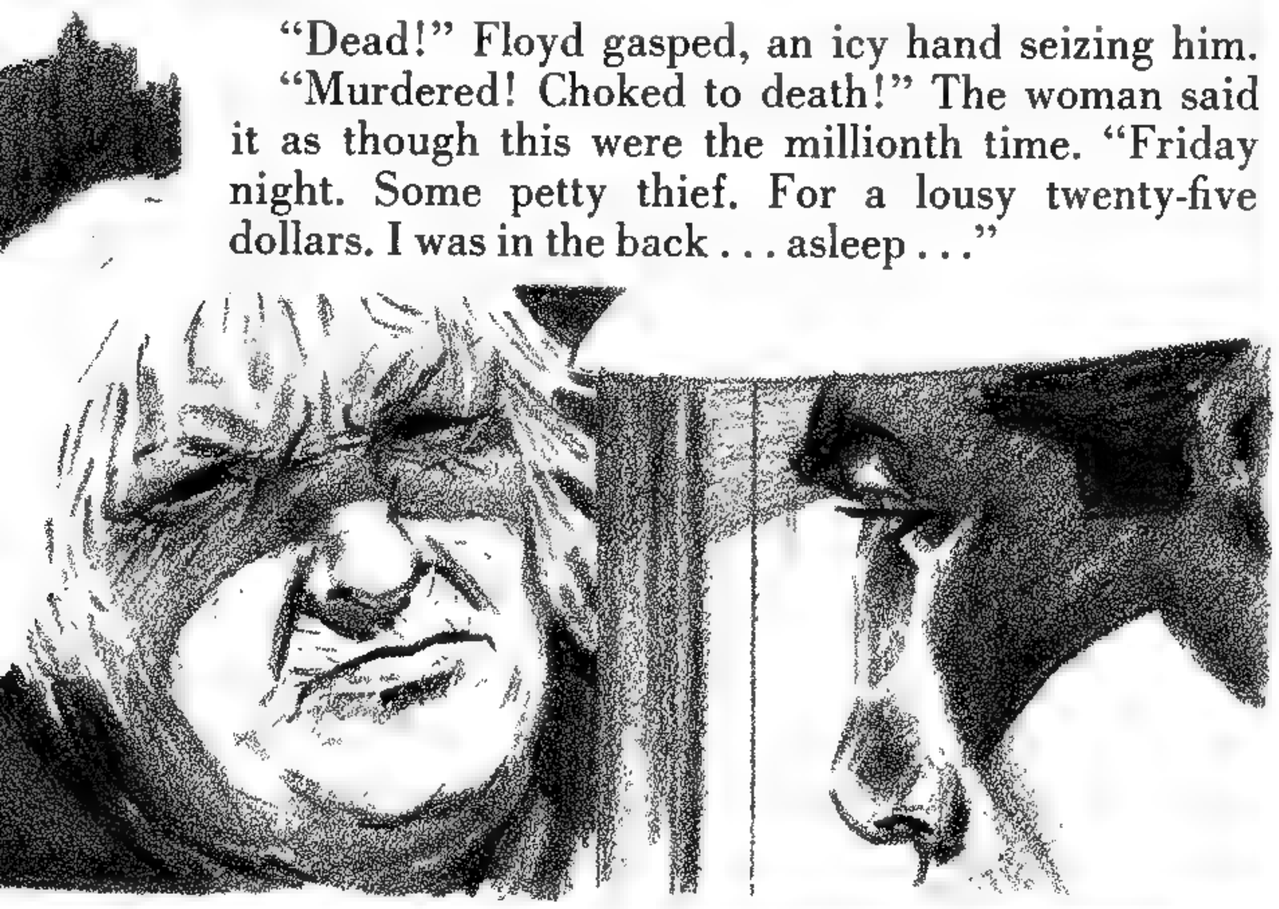
Finally, a light blinked on inside. Muffled footsteps approached. The door swung open. An old woman's face peered out. "Go away," she sighed. "No more questions!"

"I've got to see the old man who owns this store," said Floyd. "Where is he? I've got to see him!"

The old woman looked at Floyd. "My husband is dead!"

"Dead!" Floyd gasped, an icy hand seizing him.

"Murdered! Choked to death!" The woman said it as though this were the millionth time. "Friday night. Some petty thief. For a lousy twenty-five dollars. I was in the back . . . asleep . . ."



Floyd stumbled from the shop, trembling, sick. He moved up the deserted night street, mumbling to himself, "Those stains . . . on the gorilla's paw. They were blood. Joe's blood. I *know* now! The paw is . . ."

"Don't move, Buddy," a voice behind him hissed.

Floyd spun around. The man stood in the shadows, brandishing a gun. "This is a stick-up," he snarled.

"I've got a couple of bucks on me. You're welcome to that," said Floyd, raising his hands.

"Fork it over," snapped the gunman. "And that watch you're wearing, too! And no tricks!"

Reluctantly, Floyd pulled out his money and removed his watch. The hold-up man snatched them and fled down a dimly-lit alley. Floyd cursed.

"Blasted rotten luck! I don't mind the dough, but I wish he hadn't stolen my . . . watch . . ."

His voiced died as he realized what he'd said.

Instinctively, he reached for the gorilla paw in his pocket. It was gone.

"No," he whispered. "No! It's not true! It can't be true! Things like this just don't happen! Not in real life!"

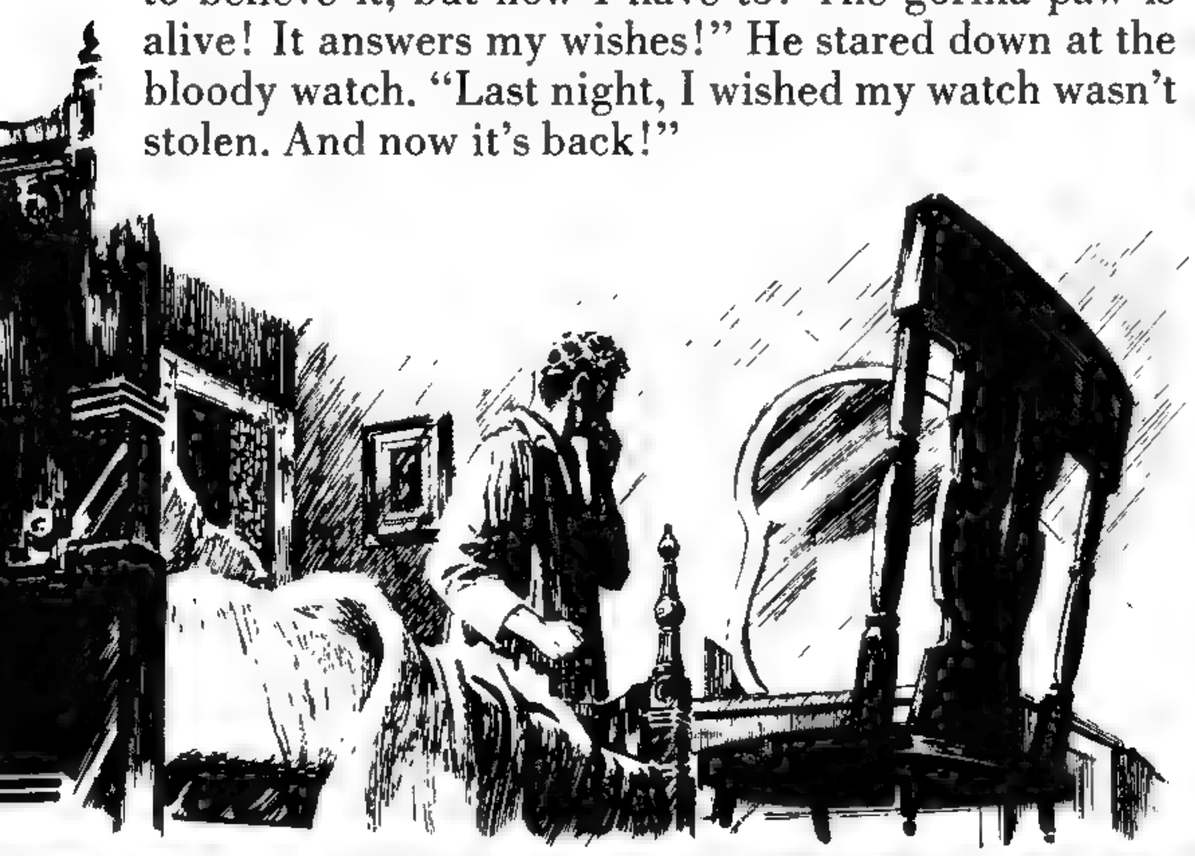
By the time Floyd reached his dismal flat, he was bathed in perspiration. He looked around his room the moment he opened the door. The paw wasn't there.

He undressed nervously and crept into bed. But he couldn't sleep. He kept thinking about Joe, with his guts torn out. And then he thought about the old man of the curio shop . . . murdered . . . for twenty-five dollars.

Towards morning, he dozed. But he awoke with a start, escaping from a nightmare of a hold-up man's terrorized face.

He got out of bed, and flicked on a light. Then he caught his breath. The paw was back . . . on the dresser. And his stolen watch lay beside it, covered with blood.

"It's true!" Floyd cried. "It's true! I didn't want to believe it, but now I have to! The gorilla paw is alive! It answers my wishes!" He stared down at the bloody watch. "Last night, I wished my watch wasn't stolen. And now it's back!"



"That first night, I wished I hadn't bought it! So it returned the twenty-five bucks I spent on it! It went and got it! It killed the old man! Then I wished poor Joe didn't have a stomach . . . and . . . *choke* . . . I've got to test it! I've got to see!"

He turned to the paw, shuddering. "I wish . . ." He looked around the room. "I wish that radio was turned on, that's what I wish!"

The paw twitched. The stiffness ran out of it like thawing meat. A finger moved. Then another.

Then it began to move. Slowly . . . painfully . . . dragging itself by its wrinkled fingers, across the dresser top, down the side, to the floor. And as it pulled itself along, it made a strange kind of scratching sound, like the sound Floyd had heard that first night.

The paw moved slowly across the floor to the table on which the radio sat. Floyd stared at the hideous crawling thing in horrified fascination. Finally, he could stand it no longer.

"Stop," he shrieked. "I wish you to stop!"

Floyd turned away. "It won't listen to me," he whispered half-aloud. "I wished, and it won't listen to me! It's doing what I first wished! It won't stop! It's got to carry out each wish to the finish before it takes on another!"

There was a click. The radio came on. The hand stiffened. The voice of a newscaster blared.

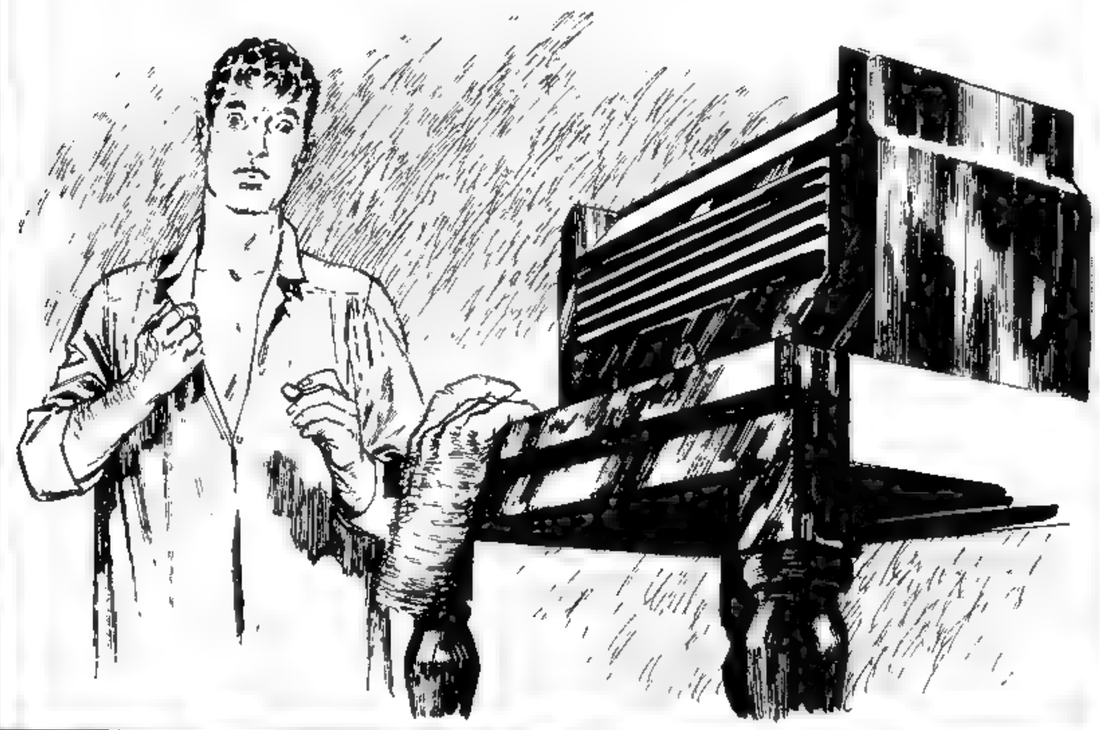
"A small time hold-up man was found in an alley at dawn today. His hand had been savagely ripped off at the wrist. The severed limb was found some yards away from the body. A preliminary coroner's report states, however, that the hoodlum's death was caused by fright, and not loss of blood. Police have been alerted to be on the lookout for . . ."

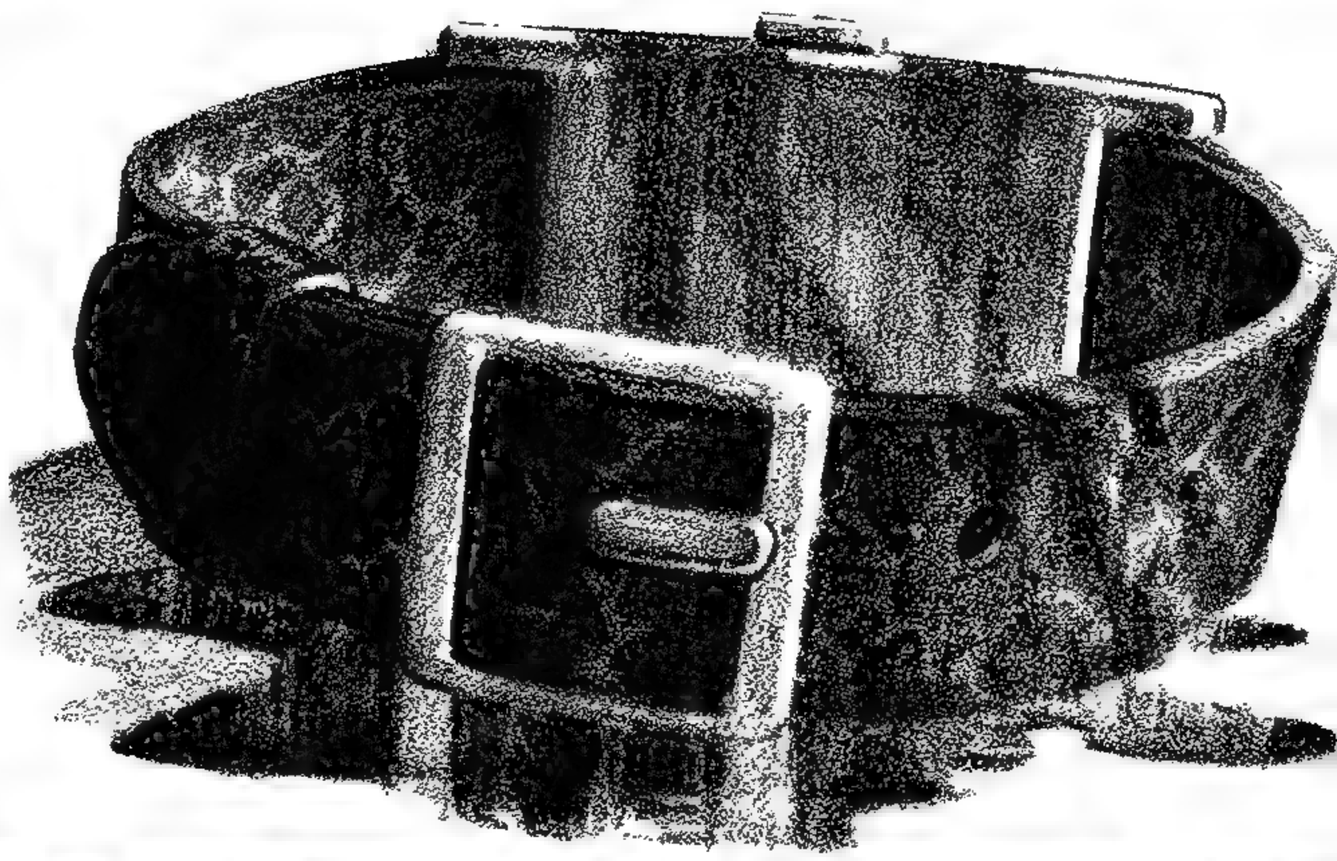
Floyd stepped to the radio and snapped it off. Then he looked at his watch lying on the dresser. The watchband was still buckled closed!

The gorilla paw moved to the table leg, began to climb, awkwardly. Finally, it reached the table-top.

"Stop, I said! I wish you to stop!"

The paw ignored Floyd's screaming. It had a mission to complete and could not be bothered.





He slipped on a robe, grabbed some change, and rushed downstairs to the pay-phone in the hall. He had to call Eddie! He had to tell him! Eddie would know what to do!

A sleepy voice answered finally.

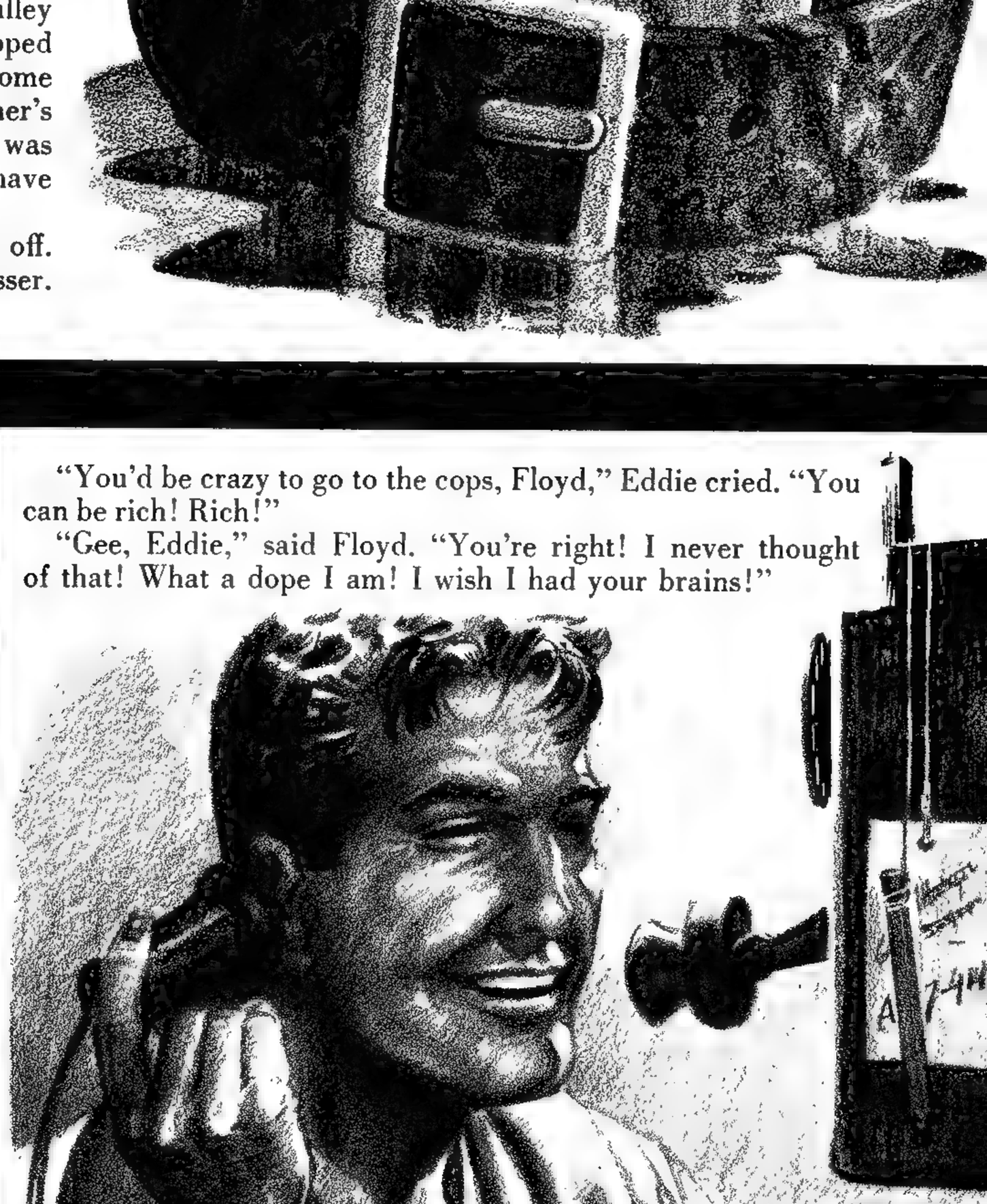
"Eddie? It's Floyd. I'm sorry I woke you up! I'm in trouble! Listen, and listen carefully!" Floyd's voice shook as he told Eddie the whole story.

". . . and the paw does whatever I wish!" he concluded. "Eddie, what should I do? Should I tell the cops? What?"

"Don't be an idiot, Floyd!" Eddie sounded wide-awake and eager now. "Why should you tell the cops? If it's true, you're set! You could wish for dough! Big dough! Ten grand, maybe! A million!"

"You'd be crazy to go to the cops, Floyd," Eddie cried. "You can be rich! Rich!"

"Gee, Eddie," said Floyd. "You're right! I never thought of that! What a dope I am! I wish I had your brains!"



Floyd hung up and went back upstairs, whistling softly. He stepped into his dingy flat. That would be the first thing he'd do! Move! Get a plush place uptown! All he'd have to do was wish, and the paw . . .

The paw! Floyd's heart stopped. He looked around the room. The paw was gone!

Floyd knelt and peered into the sack. A violent nausea swept over him. He turned away from the pale, convoluted, bloodied mess inside.

"Brains," he whispered. "Eddie's brains!"

Floyd stood by the window, looking out at the dawn city. He knew it was no use. A million times he'd wished, but he knew the paw wouldn't heed. It was on a mission. A mission it would complete.

And then, after a long while, Floyd heard the scratching at the door. He flung it open, knowing what he'd see. The paw dragged itself in, pulling the bloody sack after it.

Suddenly, Floyd screamed. He hadn't realized the entire meaning of his wish! Not until now! Not until he felt the gorilla paw spring to his back and work its way up his neck. Then he screamed.

And the last thing Floyd remembered, before everything went black, was the excruciating pain in his head . . . as though the top of his skull was being ripped away.

THE END

25c
No. 2 APRIL 1956

AN ORIGINAL

EC

PICTO-FICTION MAGAZINE

Adult Tales of TERROR

Horror and Suspense

ILLUSTRATED

AN ENTERTAINING EC CREATION

TERROR ILLUSTRATED

No. 2 APRIL 1956

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This is the second issue of "Adult Tales of TERROR Illustrated", one of a series of four new magazines to be presented in the novel and revolutionary form of adult entertainment which we at E. C. call "Picto-Fiction". The others are: "CRIME Illustrated", "CONFESSIONS Illustrated" and "SHOCK Illustrated".

At this writing, letters on TERROR's first issue are just beginning to come in. Here are some excerpts:

. . . I enjoyed your new E. C. terror magazine very much, and especially liked the "Picto-Fiction" style of story-telling. The magazine was excellent for a first issue, and will probably increase in quality with each succeeding one. Best of Luck.—Jerry McHone, Asheville, N. C.

. . . To put it mildly, I was more than pleased with the first issue. All in all, you have a great idea in your new medium, "Picto-Fiction". Keep up the high quality, and lots of luck.—Jack Promo, Detroit, Mich.

We plan a Readers' Letter Page in the next issue of TERROR Illustrated. We welcome your letters. Write to:

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Room 706, Dept. 2
225 Lafayette Street
New York 12, N. Y.

PUBLISHER
william m. gaines

EDITOR
albert b. feldstein

PRODUCTION
ric doonan

BUSINESS MGR.
lyle stuart

SUBSCRIPTIONS
gloria orlando

Terror Illustrated, Spring, Vol. 1, No. 2. Published Quarterly by I. C. Publishing Co., Inc. at 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N. Y. Application as second-class matter pending at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Subscriptions, 12 issues for $3.00 in the U. S. Elsewhere, $3.75. Entire contents Copyrighted 1956 by I. C. Publishing Co., Inc. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped return envelope. No similarity between any of the characters and names of persons appearing in this magazine and those living or dead is intended, and any such similarity is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A.

HORROR IN THE FREAK TENT

My name is Henry Hastings. Once upon a time I was the manager of one of those two-bit carnivals that hits your town every now and then. You know the kind: amusement rides, acrobats, chiseling games, girlie shows, pickpockets.

Like I say, once upon a time I managed one of those sucker traps. But I don't any more. I quit my job and I left the carnival racket, and I wouldn't go back for all the money in the world.

Most people, when they think of carnivals, think of calliope music, and ferris wheels, and pink cotton candy. And it makes them feel happy. It makes them think of all the fun they've ever had.

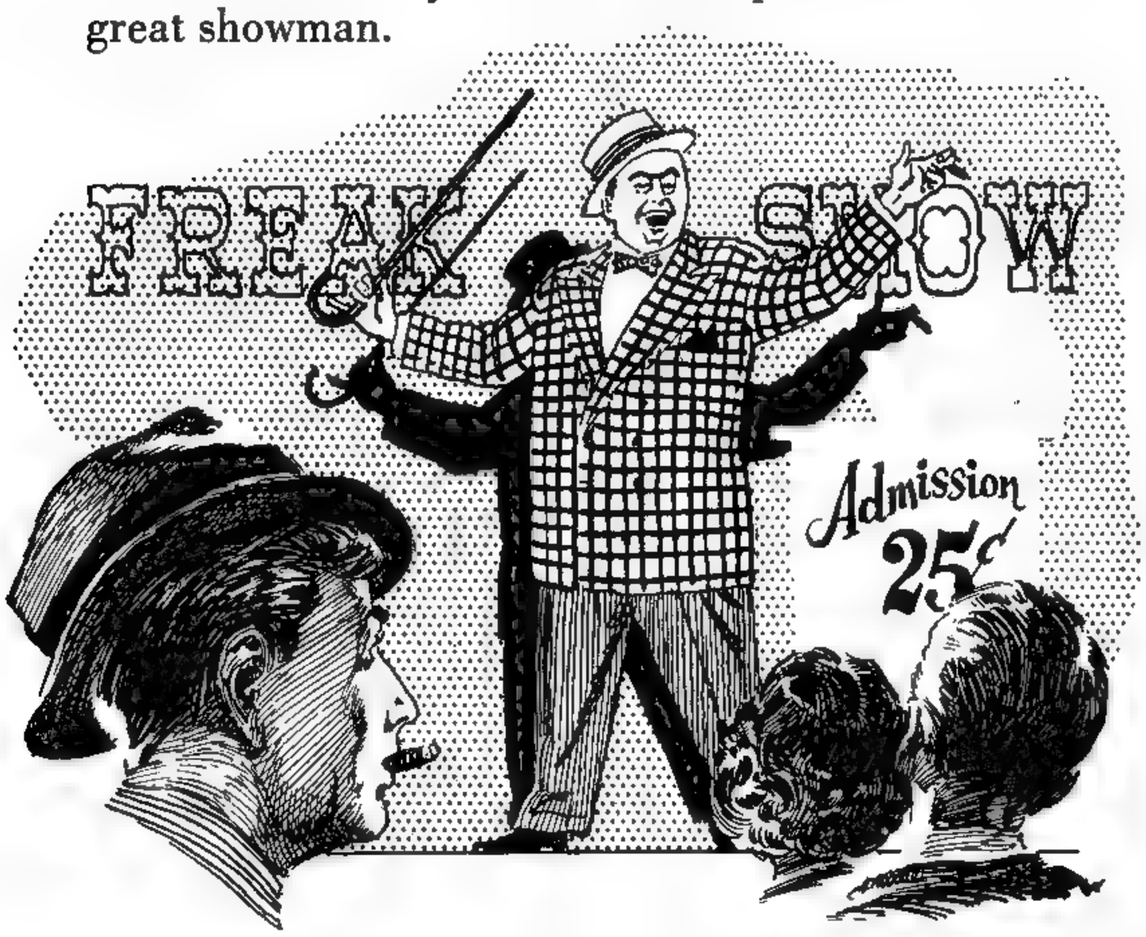
Me, I get sick to my stomach!

Because when I hear calliope music, or see a ferris wheel, or some grimy-faced kid eating pink cotton candy . . . when I even think about those things . . . I start remembering the carny I managed, and the special attraction it had. We were all pretty proud of it. It was the only carny on the circuit with a Freak Show. "Zolotow's Freaks" it was called. And it really pulled in the people.

R. CRANDALL

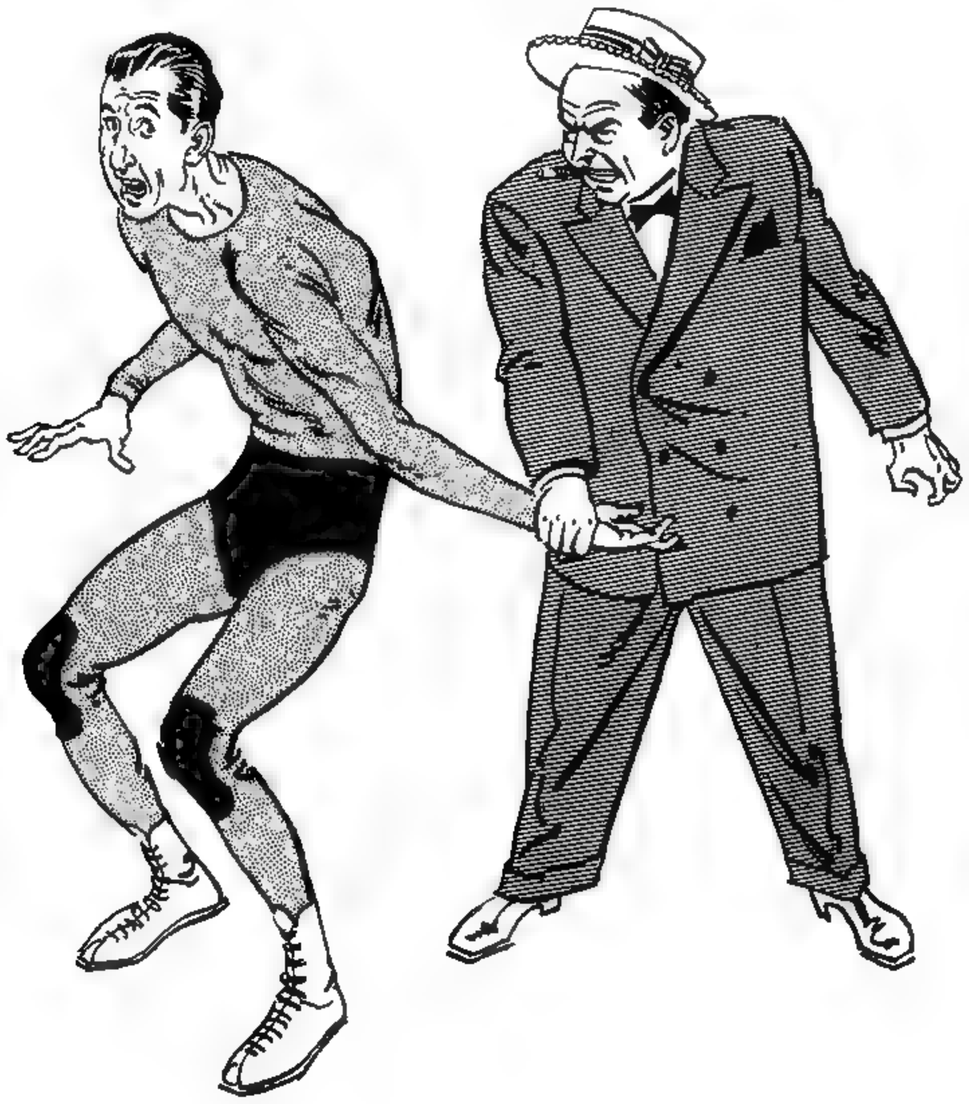
The owner of the freak concession was a short, dumpy-looking character named Lewis Zolotow. Everybody in the carny called him "Looey." Except his freaks, that is. They were taught to have more respect. Looey considered the freaks beneath him, and treated them accordingly. He was "Mister Zolotow" to them.

Out front, on the midway, you'd think Looey was the grandest guy in the world. I remember I used to walk over often, just to hear his pitch. He was one great showman.



Looey seemed to take sadistic delight in torturing the people who worked for him. And none were spared his abuse.

"What's the matter?" he'd snarl at Xetal, the Indian Rubber Man, grabbing his arm and twisting it viciously. "Don't you like your job? I caught your act tonight. Stretch it! Stretch it more!"



But Looey was just that. A showman. The whole thing was an act with him. Out front, he was all smiles. Big-hearted. Considerate of the freaks he brought out to tease the customers into seeing more.

But backstage, he was a rat. He treated the freaks like dirt. And they despised him. But they were helpless. He was the boss, and to cross him meant they'd be out of a job.

"Smile at the people," he'd scream at Fanny, the Fat Lady. "Don't just sit there, you overgrown cow! Earn your keep!"

And there was Corpus, the Armless and Legless Boy. Corpus had been born without limbs and was quite helpless. Zolotow was particularly mean to him. Especially at the chow table.

"I told you a thousand times, Fanny," Looey would shriek, "don't feed him! Put the plate down in front of him! Let him eat by himself!"

Poor Corpus would be forced to eat like a dog, and Zolotow would roar with glee, while the other freaks would watch with tears in their eyes.

"Corpus," he'd laugh. "If you had whiskers . . . I'd call you 'Fido'!"

Ricardi was the sharp-eyed Knife Thrower. His act consisted of hurling knives, ice-picks, cleavers, and the like at his lovely young wife who stood spread-eagled against a board about twenty feet away. Ricardi was sensational.

"I just thought you ought to know, that's all," Looey nodded toward Marja. "I don't like to see anybody being made a fool of!"

The Freak Show concession owner never passed up an opportunity to inflict severe physical and mental agony upon his employees. His perverted sense of humor kept him well-supplied with ingenious methods. One night, he drew Ricardi aside as he was rehearsing his act.

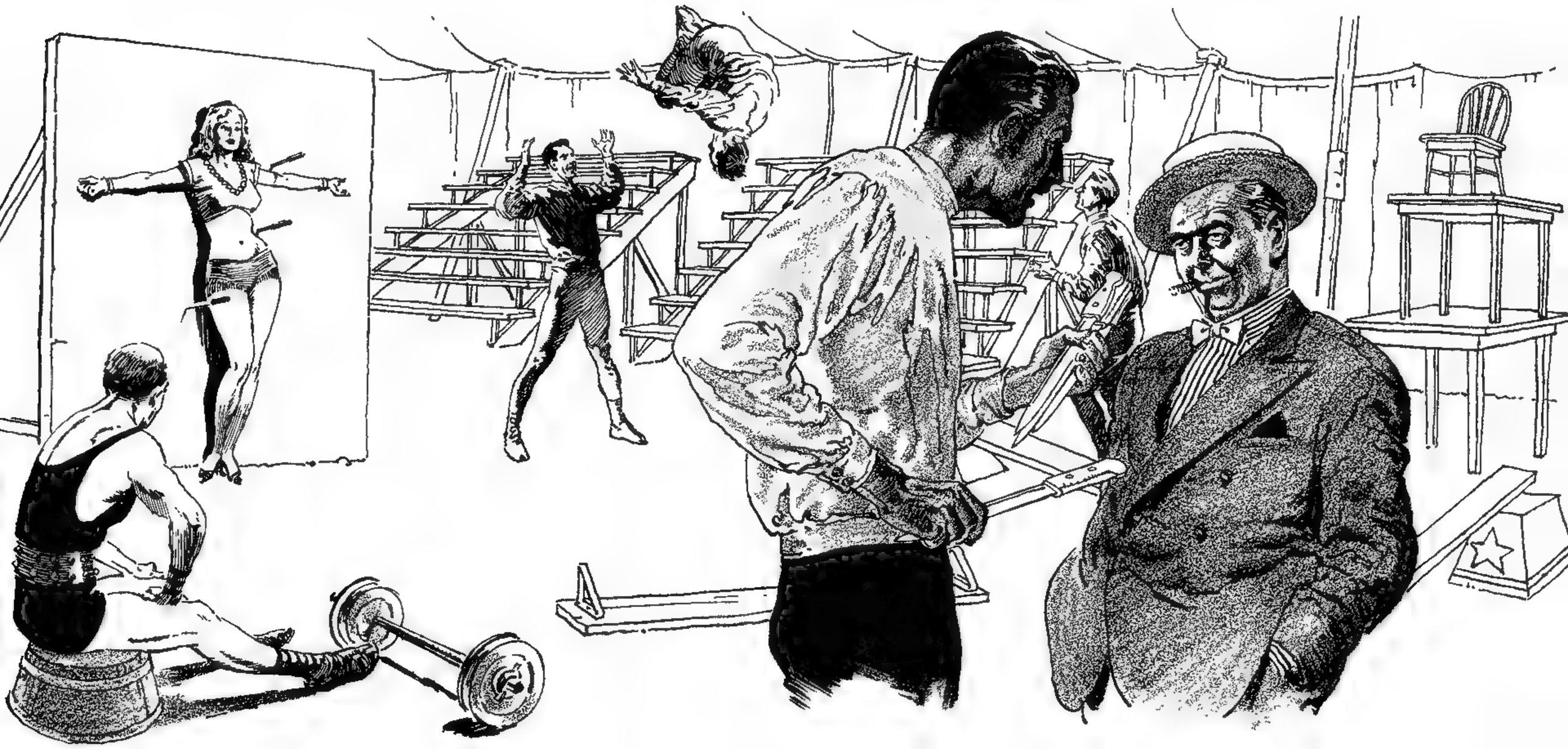
"How are you and Marja getting along lately, Ricardi?" Looey whispered out of the side of his mouth.

"What do you mean, Mr. Zolotow?" Ricardi studied him.

"It's your wife, Ricardi!" Looey puffed on his cigar. "I happen to know she's two-timing you! She's been seeing a concession owner on the sly! I won't tell you who, because . . ."

"You're lying!" Ricardi shouted. "I don't believe it!"

"Okay," Looey shrugged. "That's your prerogative! Only . . . I'd keep my eye on her if I were you."

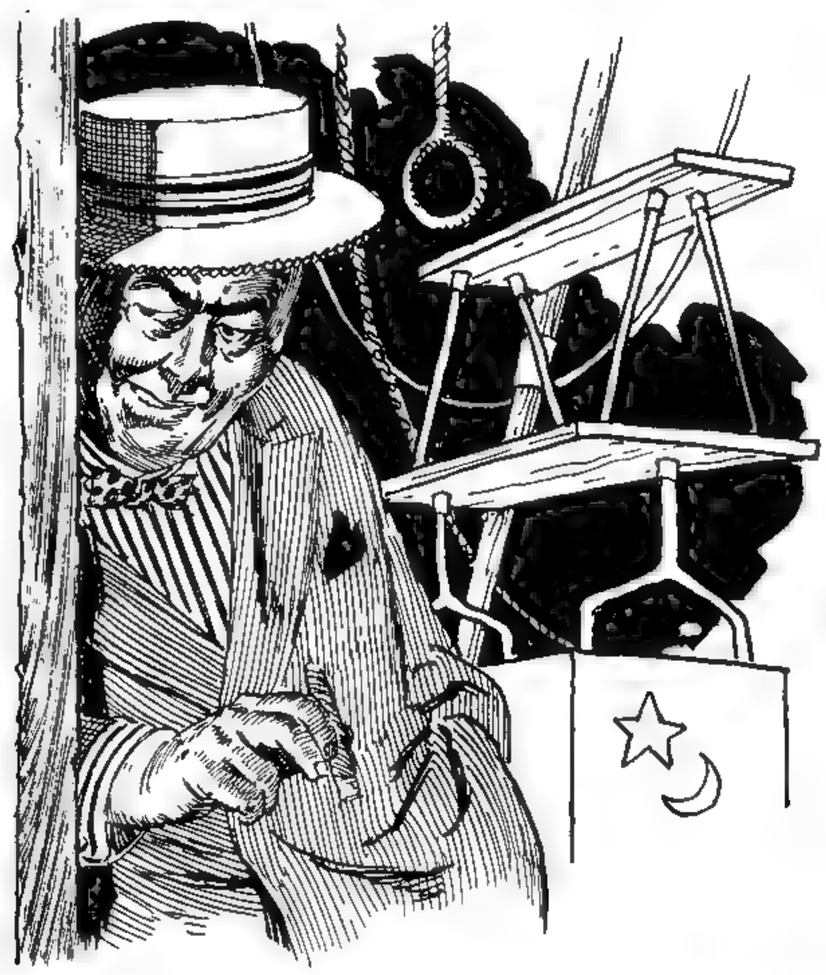


Of course, Zolotow'd lied. But, still, he'd successfully instilled that little spark of doubt and jealousy into Ricardi's mind which glowed brighter and brighter until it caused his hand to tremble ever so slightly when he went into his act.

"Remember what I told you, Marja," Zolotow cowered behind the board during the next performance. "If the knives come close, it's because Ricardi wants to get *rid* of you! There's a little dancer down the midway he's been seeing!"

"No! You're joking, Mr. Zolotow! Tell me you're joking. Ricardi wouldn't . . ." Marja whimpered.

"It would be so easy," Zolotow went on. "An accident. Who would know? And then he and that little dancing girl . . . Well, I'd watch those knives if I were you, Marja! Before it's too late!"



I'm telling you this, all of it, because I want you to know exactly what kind of a man Looey Zolotow was. I want you to know just why the freaks hated him so. So that you'll understand.

The little joke he'd played on the Ricardis had its effect. At the next afternoon's performance, Ricardi's infallible aim had vanished. The first knife he hurled nicked Marja's arm. She ran from the stage, sobbing.

Marja left the carny that night. And Ricardi came to Zolotow, his eyes red from crying.

"It's your fault!" he whined. "You broke me up! With those lies about her!"

"Watch yourself, Ricardi," Zolotow hissed, "or you'll be looking for a new carny! Get wise! She left you because she was scared! She figured you were on to her, and those knives were getting too close for comfort! Forget her!"

Ricardi broke down. He sobbed softly. "What'll I do?" He shook his head sadly. "What'll I do?"

"Don't worry, Ricardi!" Zolotow grinned. "I know where I can find a new partner for you for your act. I've got just the girl in mind. She's a little dancing girl . . . down the midway . . ."

Marja came back to the carnival the last night before it was scheduled to move on. Maybe she wanted to make up, I don't know. I saw her in the crowd and was at her side when Ricardi went into his act. Marja watched with tears in her eyes.

"The little dancing girl . . ." she whispered to no one in particular. ". . . from down the midway! Then . . . it's true! It's all . . . true!"

She turned, sobbing, and pushed through the crowd.

There was nothing I could do. Zolotow's little joke had now been carried to its extreme. Marja left the carnival grounds crying, and never came back. And even I began to dislike the evil Freak Show owner.

Then, one evening, Ricardi invited me to the Freak Show's chow table.

"It was good of you to come, Mr. Hastings," Ricardi smiled.

"It was good of you to ask me, Ricardi. I . . ."

"FANNY!" Zolotow's snarl interrupted me.

Fanny, the Fat Lady, froze, the spoon in her hand. Corpus, the Armless and Legless Boy, paled, wide-eyed. Zolotow's face turned livid.

"How many times have I told you not to feed Corpus?" he screamed. "How many times have I told you to let him eat by himself?"

"But, Mr. Zolotow," Fanny stammered. "He . . . he can't eat by himself! Not unless he eats like an . . . an animal! And he's not an animal! He's . . ."

"He'll feed himself!" Zolotow's voice quavered. "Or perhaps you'd like to feed him while you're both looking for jobs!"

"I'm sorry, Corpus," Fanny turned to him with a helpless expression.

"I understand, Fanny. It's all right," said Corpus.

Suddenly, Ricardi moved. His hand shot to his pocket as he rose, and he whipped out a knife. The blade flashed open with a resounding click.

"Leave him alone, Zolotow," he cried.

Looey spun around and his face went white.

"Put down that knife, Ricardi," he hissed.

"Don't you ever torment that boy again, or I *will* put down this knife, Zolotow," Ricardi whispered, his voice shaking. ". . . Right through your ugly skull!"

An uncomfortable silence fell over the table. I had suddenly lost my appetite. I was horrified at Zolotow's inhumanity.

The rest of the freaks continued to eat, but Corpus just sat there, head bowed, eyeing his food.

Zolotow leaped to his feet. "Feed yourself, Corpus," he snarled. "Like this!" And he pushed the poor boy's face into the plate.

I was dumbstruck . . . frozen with horror . . . powerless to move as I watched the ensuing scene. Looey flushed beet-red. His eyes blazed. He had been made a fool of in front of his entire troupe. He wouldn't stand for that. Not Looey Zolotow.

He rushed to the corner of the tent and scooped up two irons that the Fire-Eater had been heating for the evening performance. They were white-hot.

"Threaten me with a knife, will you?" he growled. "I'll teach you!"

It was all over before I could do anything to stop it. Zolotow rushed at Ricardi as the freaks and I watched, paralyzed with horror, and rammed the white hot irons into his face . . . his eyes.

Ricardi's screams of agony echoed up and down the evening midway.

"You crazy fool!" I managed to finally choke out. "You've . . . blinded him!"

"He had it coming," gasped Zolotow, staring down at the writhing knife-thrower.

Ricardi lay on the tanbark floor of the tent, his face cupped in his arms, shrieking. The smell of burned flesh filled the air. I felt a sudden wave of nausea sweep over me, and I stumbled toward the entrance, seeking a breath of fresh air.

"Somebody get a doctor," Fanny was sobbing. "Somebody get a doctor!"

In a little while, the carnival grounds rang with the sound of police and ambulance sirens. The white-coated interns came and took Ricardi away, and the police questioned Zolotow and the freaks.

Zolotow pleaded self-defense. Ricardi had pulled a knife on him and he'd protected himself. He was sorry that he'd blinded him, but . . .

The freaks, of course, were too terrorized to say anything to the contrary. They corroborated Zolotow's story.

Ricardi was sent to the local hospital, and when he was released, his case was dismissed for lack of evidence. The carnival had moved on, and Zolotow had not appeared to press charges.

Can you imagine? Ricardi . . . begging Zolotow's forgiveness? It made me sick. And it was all I could do to keep from tearing the fat Freak Show owner apart when I heard him answer Ricardi:

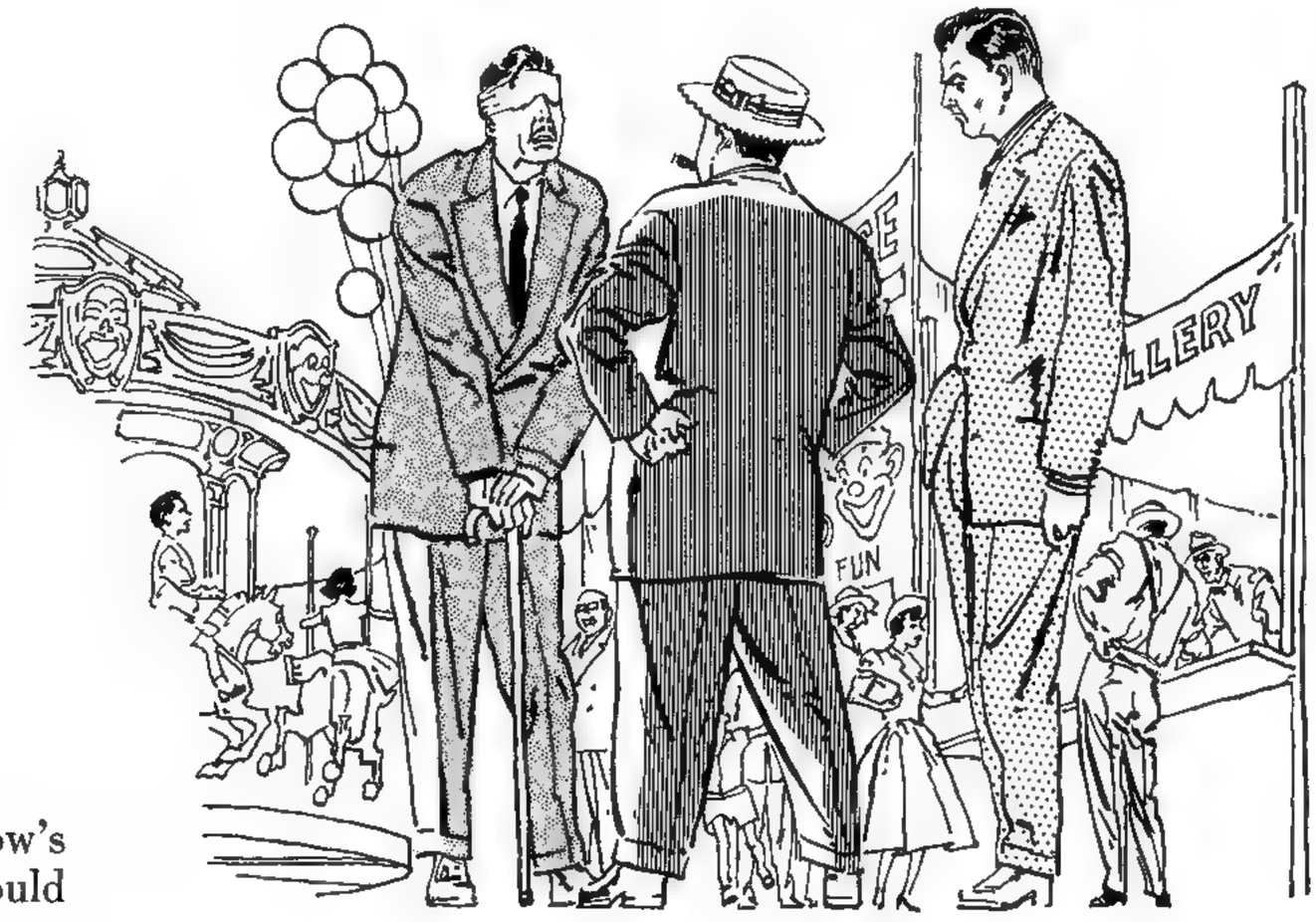
"Get out! Get out, Ricardi! You're through! Washed up! Finished! You can't do an act . . . blind! Get out and don't come back!"

After his release, Ricardi followed the carnival route until he caught up with it.

He came down the deserted midway one night, tapping a new white cane ahead of him, his eyes swathed in bandages. He came looking for Looey Zolotow.

"I need work, Looey," he whined. "I'm sorry about everything! Really I am! Give me a job, Looey! Please?"

He stood there with his blind eyes and begged forgiveness.



But I wasn't the only one who was steamed. I saw the faces of the freaks that had gathered around. I saw the looks in their eyes, and I knew what was going through their minds as they watched Ricardi turn and make his way slowly back down the midway.

I knew that their hearts went out to the poor blind knife-thrower as mine did.

It was a week later that I went to Fanny, the Fat Lady's tent to ask if she'd heard anything from Ricardi since that night he'd come back to the carnival. As I pulled back the flap, a figure melted into the shadows. But one look at the white of the bandage over his eyes was enough.

"Ricardi," I gasped. "What are you doing here?"

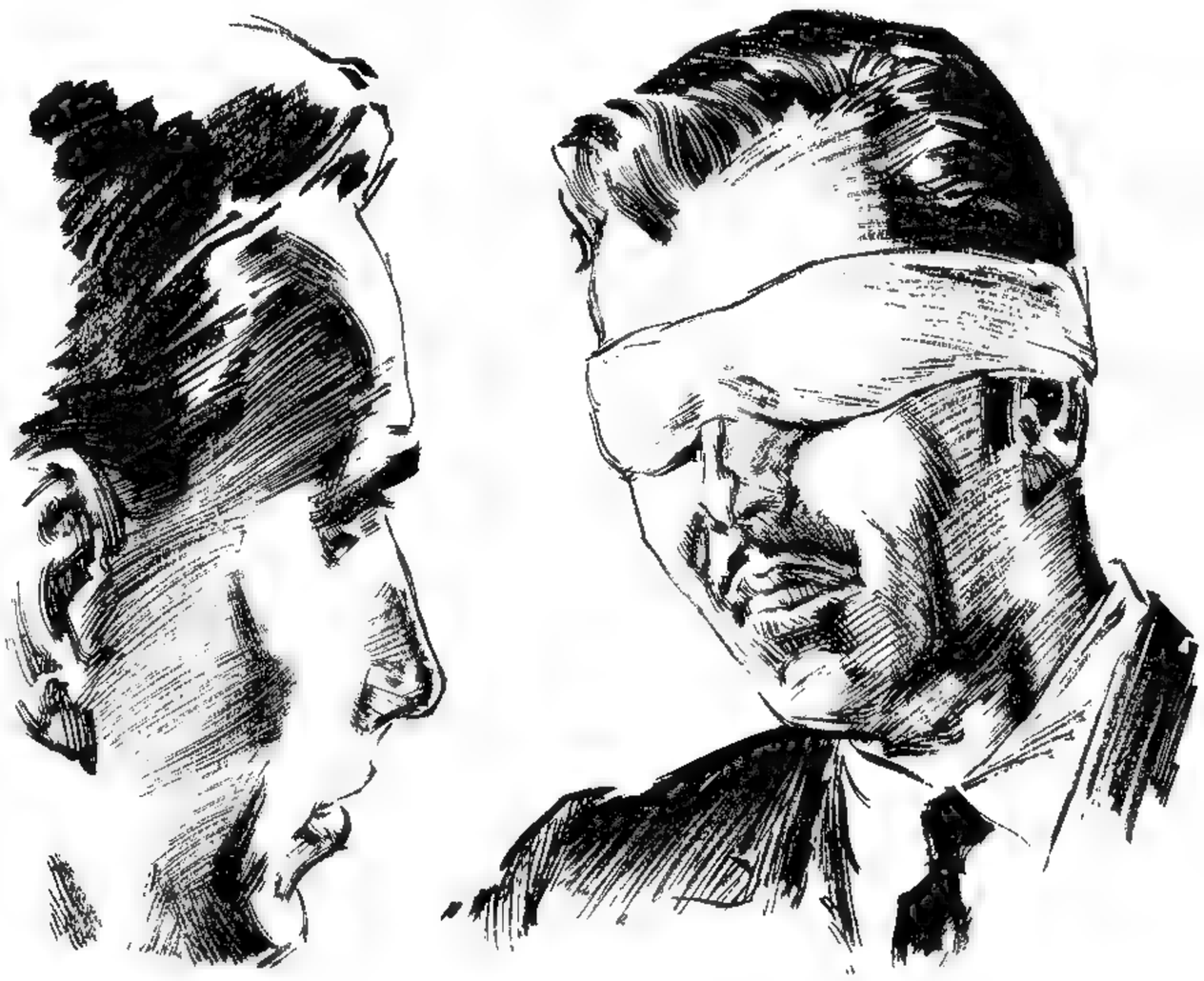
"Who . . . who is it?" Ricardi hissed.

"It's me, Ricardi! Mr. Hastings! What are you doing here in Fanny's tent?"

"Hiding, Mr. Hastings," Ricardi edged out of the shadows. "Fanny and Xetal and Corpus and the rest are taking care of me!"

"That's good of them, Ricardi," I said.

"Yes," he went on. "They bring me food . . . and they hide me from Mr. Zolotow!"



"But, Ricardi," I reasoned. "You can't go on like this forever . . ."

"I know, Mr. Hastings. And we're working on that!"

"Working on what, Ricardi?"

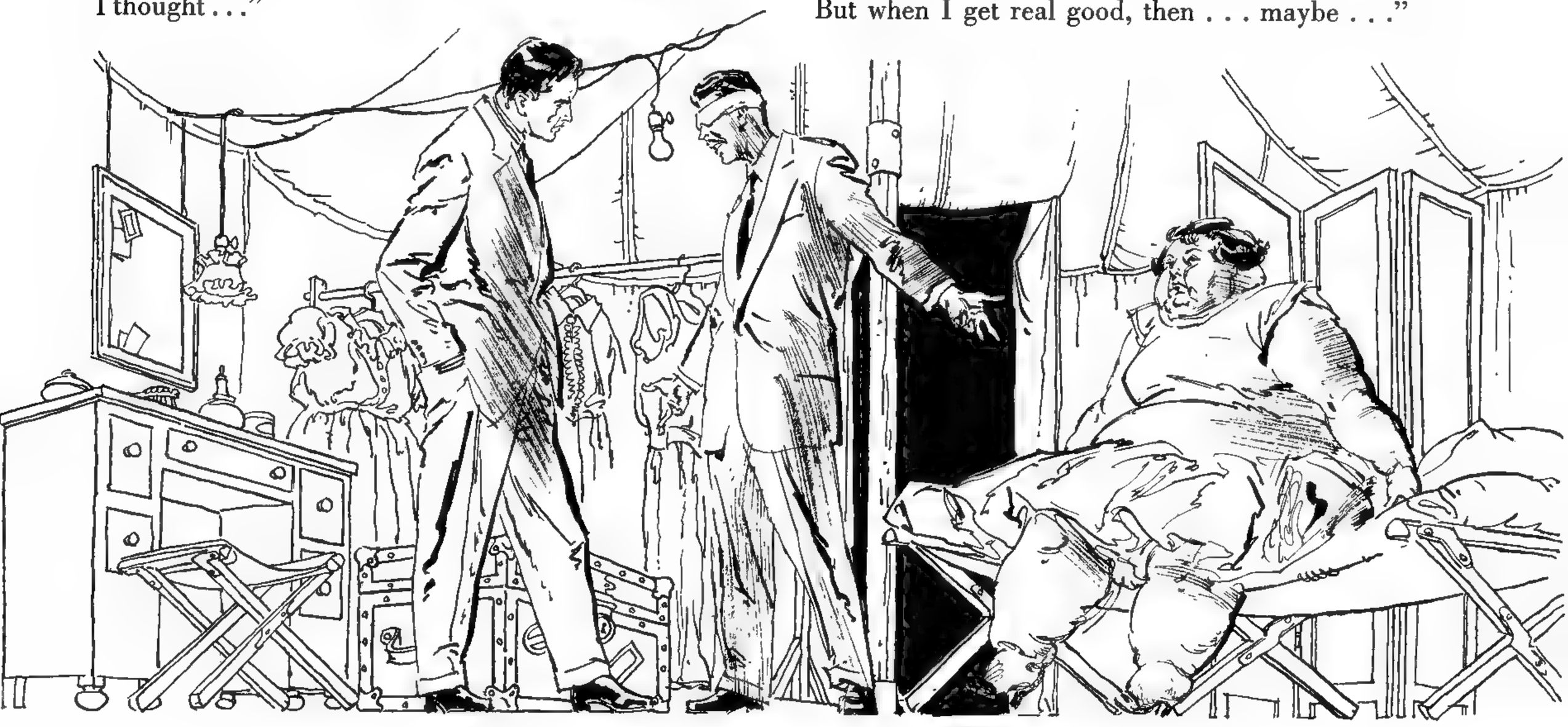
"An act, Mr. Hastings! Fanny and Corpus and Xetal! They're teaching me! It's easy! Easier than I thought . . ."

"They're teaching you an act?" I couldn't believe it. "What kind of an act, Ricardi?"

"Why, throwing knives again!" Ricardi grinned eagerly. "It's easy! They just face me toward the board . . . and I try to visualize my partner!"

"Partner?"

"Oh, of course, we're only using a dummy, now! But when I get real good, then . . . maybe . . ."



Ricardi was like a little boy again. He bubbled and chattered about his new act and what a sensation it would be when he perfected it. He took me by the hand and led me out behind Fanny's tent to where a board with a stuffed dummy had been set up. And he made me face him toward it, while he threw a few knives.

He missed the board completely. Every time.

As I made my way back to my tent, I felt like I wanted to cry. The freaks had done wonders with Ricardi. He bore no malice. He wanted only to work again. And he had such confidence in himself.

"I wonder if it could be possible?" I whispered into the midway wind. "If Ricardi could go on again? Throwing his knives. Blind?"

But it did not dampen his eagerness.

"I'll learn, Mr. Hastings," he grinned. "I'll learn! You'll see! So, promise me you won't tell Mr. Zolotow about it, Mr. Hastings! At least not until I'm ready to show it to him! Then, maybe he might forgive me . . . and take me back . . ."

I did not see Ricardi again until one afternoon about a month later. The freaks had kept him well-hidden. He stumbled into my office, his face beaming. The bandages were gone.

"Tonight, Mr. Hastings! I'm going to perform tonight! Fanny told me Mr. Zolotow would see my act tonight! You come too! Please!"

"I'll be there, Ricardi," I said. "I wouldn't miss this for anything!"

And I meant what I said. That night, I made my way to the Freak Tent. The audition had already started when I entered, for I heard the sounds of gay laughter and hearty applause.

"Good shot, Ricardi," Fanny squealed.

"Bravo," cried Xetal.

I watched, fascinated. I had come in behind the backboard and I could see their faces. The freaks. They were smiling. Laughing. It had been so long since I'd seen any of them smile.

"A little higher this time, Ricardi," Corpus instructed.

"Use an ice pick this time, Ricardi," said the Fire-Eater.

Ricardi was smiling too, although it was a blank smile. A face without eyes lacks so much expression.

Ricardi threw the ice pick. It made a dull thud as it hit. A cheer went up and the freaks applauded enthusiastically.

"Good, Ricardi," giggled Fanny. "Good!"

"Another, Ricardi! Another ice pick!" said the Fire-Eater and handed it to him.

"This time try to get it a little higher and to the right, Ricardi," Corpus instructed.

The second ice-pick was thrown. It, too, must have hit true, for the freaks roared with delight. Their applause echoed back and forth in the huge, empty Freak Tent. Although I could not see from my vantage point how accurate Ricardi was, I applauded too, from sheer joy at seeing all of them so happy.

"Someone's there . . . behind the board," gasped the Bearded Lady.

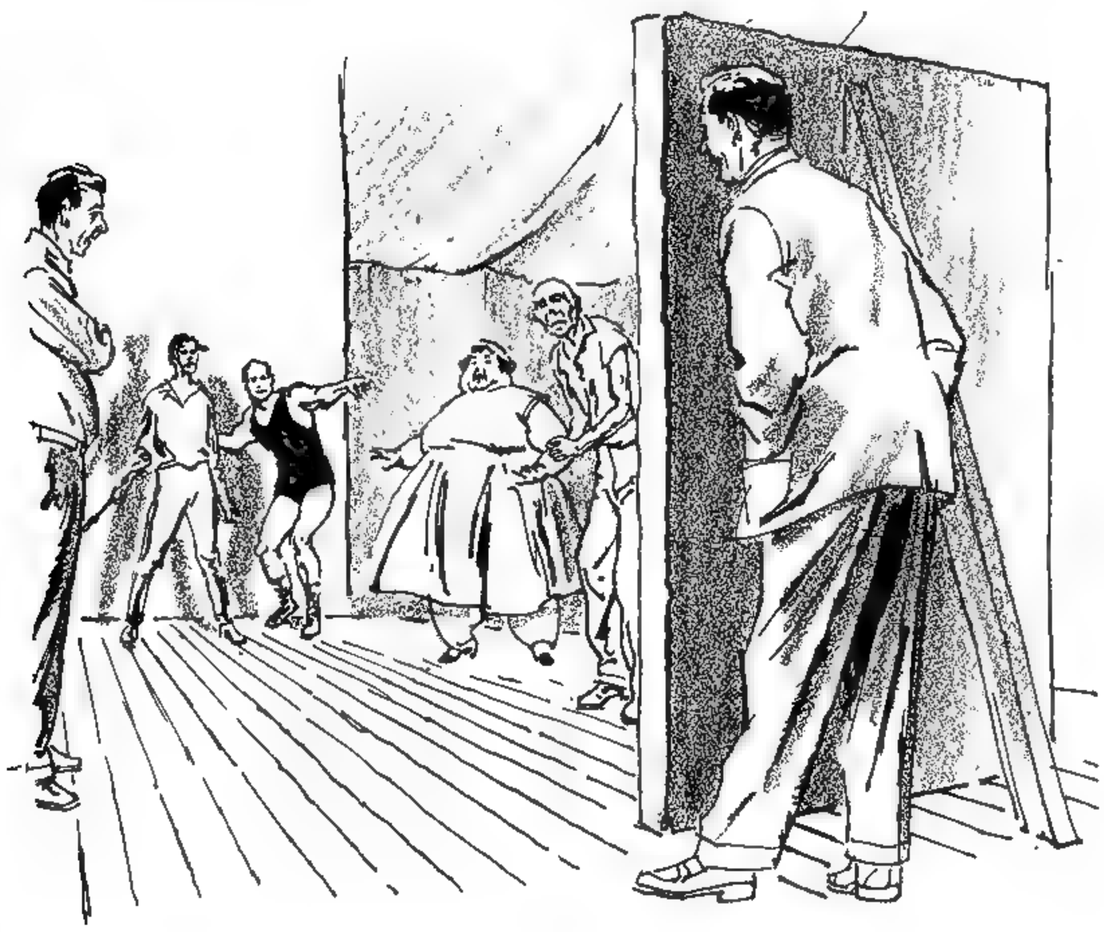
"Is that you, Mr. Hastings?" called Ricardi.

"Yes, Ricardi. It's me!"

"I'm showing Mr. Zolotow my act, Mr. Hastings. Can you see well?"

"Well enough, Ricardi. Go ahead."

I did not want to move. I had not seen such happiness among the freaks for so long, I wanted to stay where I could see their faces. There's where the real show was. Not the board.



The cleaver landed with a dull thud. And suddenly, my blood ran cold. I heard an unmistakable groan. I looked down.

There was a pool of blood at the base of the backboard!

A nausea swept over me.

"Now the cleaver," shrieked Corpus.

"Yes, the cleaver," howled Fanny.

I looked for Looey Zolotow. I wanted to see his expression. I knew he would go for this act. But he wasn't down in front.

"Where's Looey, Ricardi?" I asked.

"He's watching, isn't he?" Ricardi grinned.

"Sure, Ricardi! Sure he's watching," said Fanny, handing him the cleaver.

The freaks had gagged and tied Looey Zolotow to the board. And Ricardi's aim had been horribly bad . . . or good, as the case may be. He'd rarely missed! The freaks had guided him well!

"Sure, he's watching," giggled Fanny. "Now, one more cleaver and your act will be over, Ricardi!"

"Lord have mercy on them," I whispered as I stumbled away.

THE END

Mr. Jeremy was quite spent. He had been rather short of breath of late, and so he leaned upon his shovel and watched while Parks dug on, his slight, neatly-clad body and fine, sensitive face in such marked contrast with Parks's heavy muscles and flat features.

The cemetery was dark and very still, so that the sounds of Parks's shovel made a soft chush-chush-chush, easily audible. Mr. Jeremy liked the sound.

He liked to think of it as a sort of requiem; a sort of final contact between the living and the dead. Mr. Stevens, the undertaker, thought that *he* was the last link between Masonville's citizens and those they buried, but Mr. Stevens was wrong! And a lot Mr. Jeremy could tell the whole town about Mr. Stevens! About cheap shrouds substituted for expensive ones, about corpses carelessly tossed into their caskets!

But of course, Mr. Jeremy never would tell the town. How could he? Then they would know that *he* was a *grave robber!*

Though Mr. Jeremy was a grave robber, he was a sensitive man, not at all brutalized by his calling. Did he not hum a little tune silently in his head, even now?

Heigh-ho, it is a dreary business, a dreary business by far . . .

But the dead are dead, and the living must live, and that's the way things are . . .

But Parks had uncovered the casket now . . . the casket buried only this afternoon with such tears and lamentations.

Time was of the essence in Mr. Jeremy's profession. A grave, newly dug, could be opened and reclosed with no one the wiser. While a grave left untouched for some time might be overgrown with weeds or covered with vines tenderly planted. To replace the sod upon such a grave was a delicate task, most time-consuming.

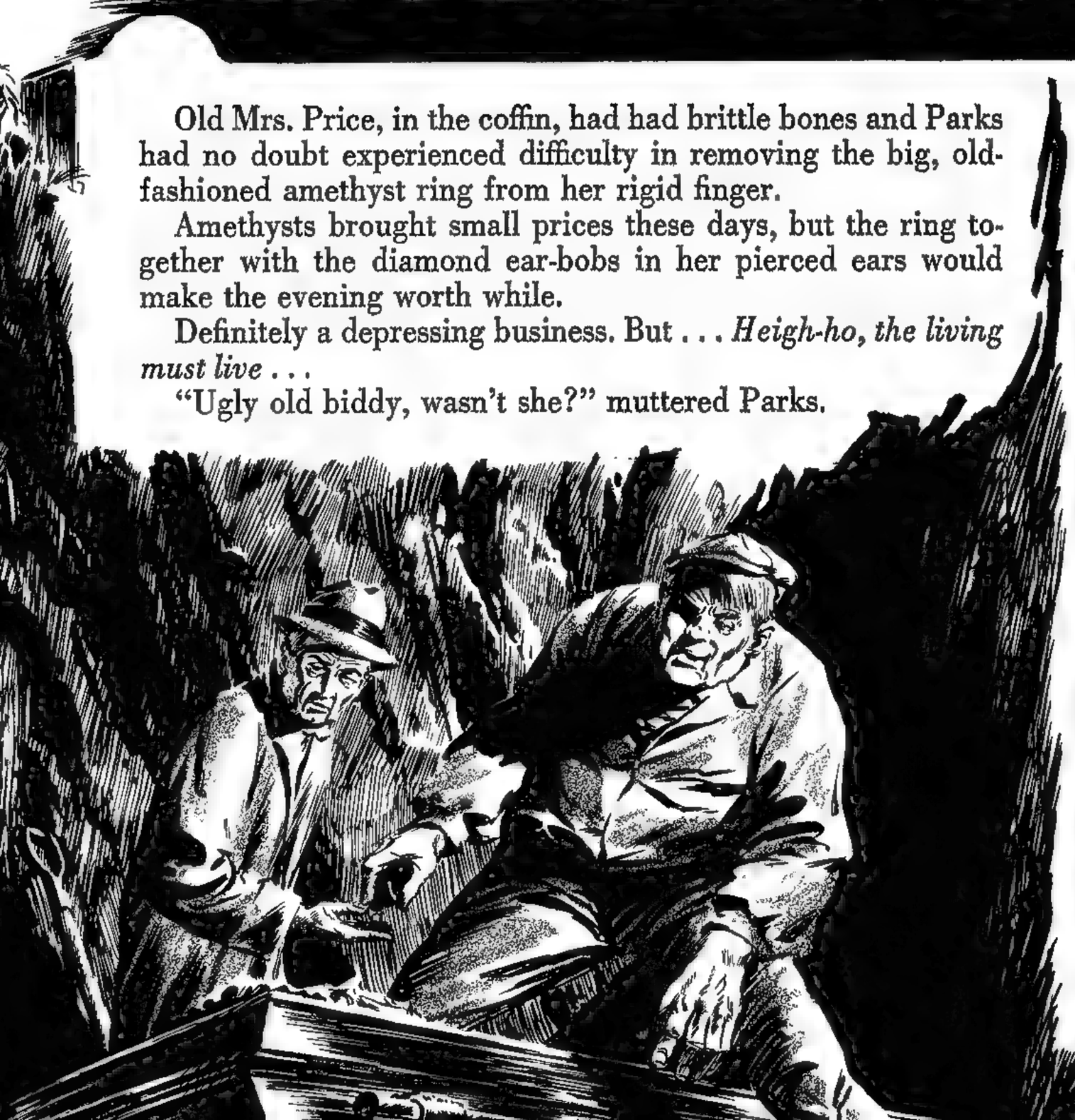
Mr. Jeremy shuddered. Parks was such an unfeeling brute. He had pried open the lid of the casket with his spade, and Mr. Jeremy distinctly heard the small snapping noise.

Old Mrs. Price, in the coffin, had had brittle bones and Parks had no doubt experienced difficulty in removing the big, old-fashioned amethyst ring from her rigid finger.

Amethysts brought small prices these days, but the ring together with the diamond ear-bobs in her pierced ears would make the evening worth while.

Definitely a depressing business. But . . . *Heigh-ho, the living must live . . .*

"Ugly old biddy, wasn't she?" muttered Parks.



Ugly? Ah, me! Mr. Jeremy sighed. He could remember Mrs. Price when she was young and soft and all the bachelors in Masonville courted her. So prim . . . so dignified. But where was her dignity now, with Parks straddling her coffin and grinning at her in the darkness?

Mr. Jeremy was about to chide Parks, but he was still short of breath. And Parks was not one to be abashed by words concerning the dignity of the dead. Parks was sexton of the cemetery, and callous.

Had it really been almost twenty years since Mr. Jeremy had found Parks in his cups one night and delicately broached the subject of opening graves for a profit?

But . . . yes, it had been. Almost twenty years! Mr. Jeremy's heaving lungs and white locks and those confounded toothaches attested to that. Ah, well . . .

"Finish up," said Mr. Jeremy, turning to leave.

"My money first," said Parks.

"After I sell the stones!"

So petty. So mercenary. The clod! Mr. Jeremy detested Parks.

Mr. Jeremy went home, washed carefully, and went to bed, exhausted.

He would have to take better care of himself. Really he would. There was this breathlessness of late, and that annoying tooth he had meant to have attended . . .

Oh, my, yes, the dentist was very kind. It was common knowledge that Mr. Jeremy lived on a small pension. But Mr. Jeremy smiled and ordered the best. After all, the dentist would be paying for it himself, in a way.

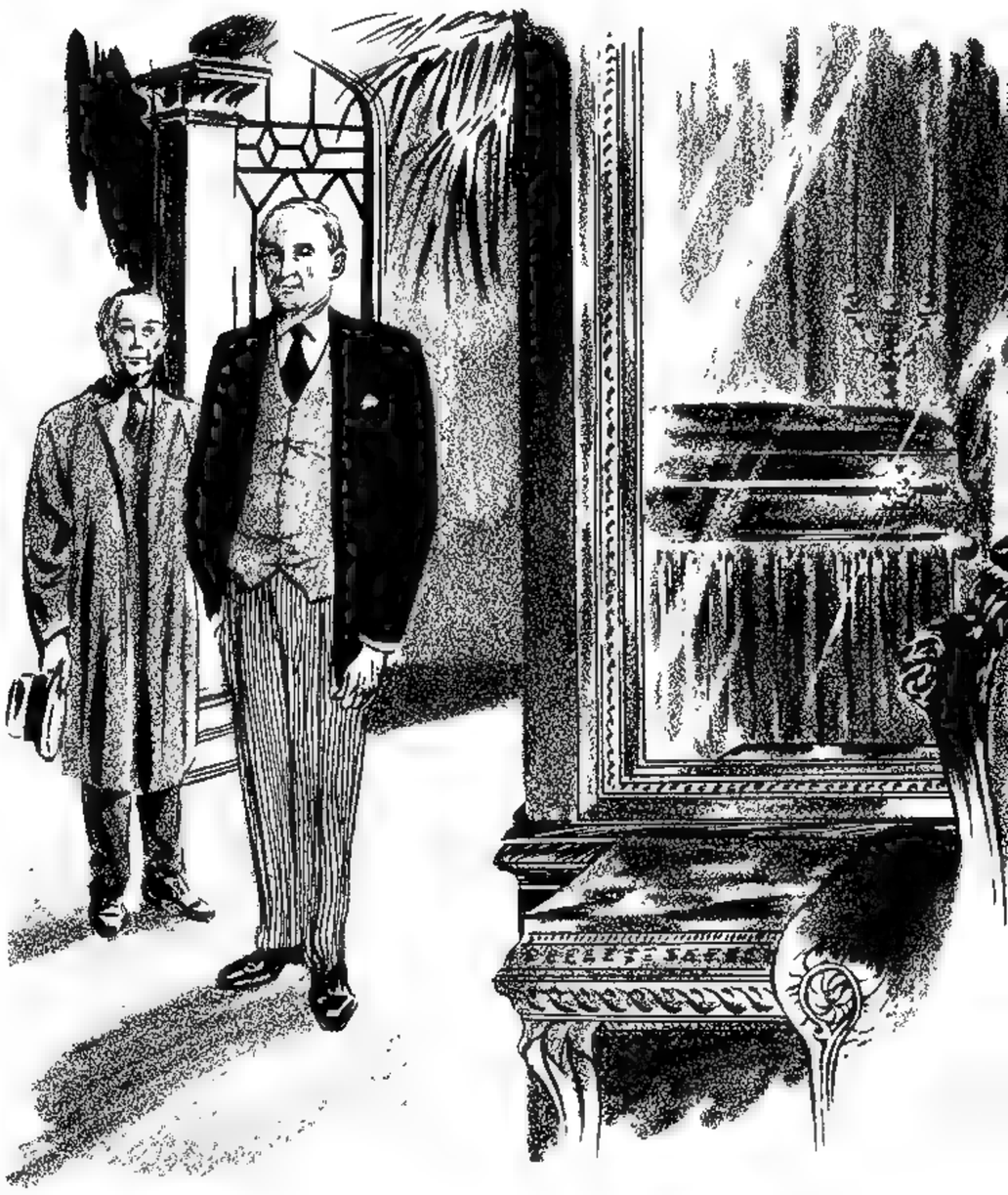
It had only been some six months since Mr. Jeremy had unearthed the body of the dentist's ten year old daughter . . . dead of pneumonia, poor little thing . . . and removed from her wasted neck her deceased mother's emerald brooch, sentimentally interred with her by her father . . .

But . . . *heigh-ho* . . .

The dentist was kind in the morning. Everyone was kind to Mr. Jeremy, as people always are kind to elders who smile and are gentle and pat the heads of playing children as they pass.

"This filling will have to be replaced," said the dentist. "And this one. And this. I'm afraid it will be rather expensive, but . . . we'll work something out."

Afterwards, Mr. Jeremy walked the sunlit streets of Masonville and watched the children playing. It was such a pleasant afternoon. It seemed a shame to spoil it with business. But one must be practical. Toward evening, he strolled past the funeral parlor and stopped to chat with Mr. Stevens. Any deaths today? Any corpses?



Mr. Stevens shook his head. No luck there. Mr. Jeremy strolled on. And suddenly, he gasped at the fire in his chest. Suddenly he leaned for support against the trunk of an old elm, fighting the nausea which overwhelmed him.

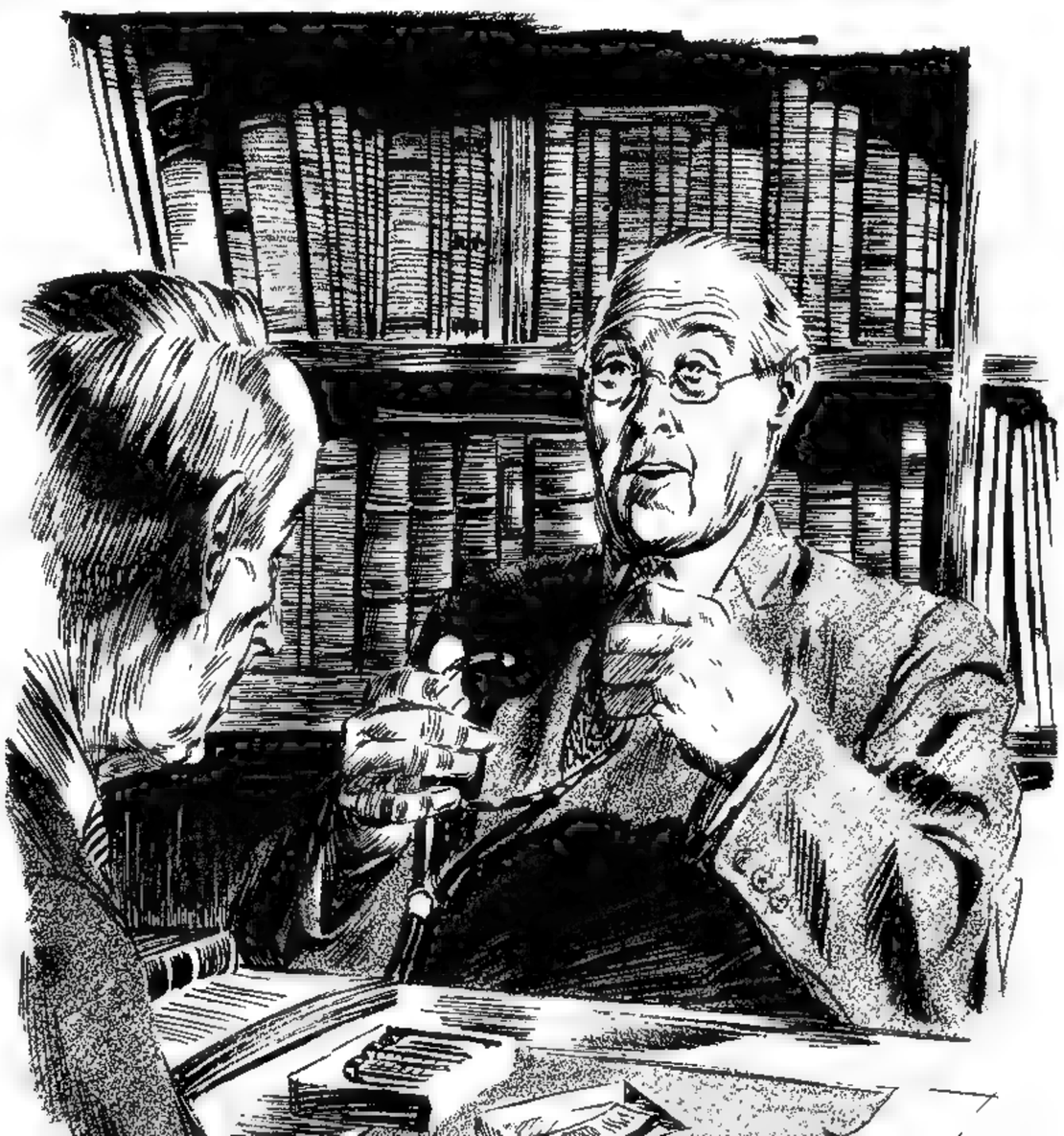
It was his heart, of course. After he had come to himself a bit, Mr. Jeremy went directly to Doctor Blaine's. Poor Doctor Blaine! The funeral wreath was still on the door, though his dear wife had been gone for almost a month now.

The Blaines had been such a devoted couple. Mr. Jeremy had actually regretted the necessity when he and Parks had dug up her corpse and removed her diamond wedding band . . . the one the doctor had given her on their twenty-fifth anniversary. Many a pleasant evening Mr. Jeremy had spent in her house.

But . . . *Heigh-ho* . . .

The doctor shook his head. "I won't lie to you, Jeremy," he said. "It's bad. A leaky heart valve. You can live for quite a while . . . or you can go tomorrow. All I can advise is that you live moderately. And you already do that. I'm sorry."

Doctor Blaine gave Mr. Jeremy a small vial of pills. "To be taken in case of any sudden nausea or pain," he instructed.



But the verdict was apparent. Mr. Jeremy had little time left. And so, he began to think.

Mr. Jeremy was a clever man. But he had never thought along these lines before. Death had always been close, but never a personal thing to him. It was different now. When Parks came to him the next day with the news, he shook his head.

"No, you say?" Oh, Parks was a surly, greedy hulk. "Maybe you didn't understand me! I said old man Price is dead!"

"He's laid out in Stevens's place right now. I talked to Stevens," Parks's eyes gleamed, "and he's being buried with his diamond ring and that platinum watch the clerks at his bank gave him!"

"I heard you!" Mr. Jeremy attempted a strategem. "But . . . well, listen, Parks. Price was a friend of mine. An old friend. Perhaps, just this once, it would be just as well to permit the corpse to rest in peace . . ."

"Friend? *Friend?*" Suddenly Parks was laughing. Roaring. "You!? Talking about friends!"

Then, just as suddenly, Parks was no longer laughing. "You old hypocrite! You want him all for yourself, don't you? Friends! Hah! You'd steal the pennies off your dead mother's eyes! And so would I! We're two of a kind! We share and share alike!"

In the end, Mr. Jeremy tried to tell Parks about his heart. But of course Parks didn't believe it. So Mr. Jeremy had to promise to be at the cemetery that night. And after he'd gone, Parks's words lingered in Mr. Jeremy's head.

"*And so would I! We're two of a kind!*"

Mr. Jeremy shook himself. The indignity of it! To die . . . to be laid to rest . . . and then to be dug up and stripped of whatever valuables loved ones had seen fit to inter with you! An unpleasant prospect! Why, the man had no conscience!

No conscience at all, Mr. Jeremy learned that night. Parks was waiting when he arrived. Together, they went to where the freshly turned earth lay heaped in a new grave mound. Together, they dug . . . until the rich casket was exposed. Price had been a wealthy man; the town banker. A man respected. A man treated with awe by the people of Masonville. But there was little that was awesome about Mr. Price now. And Parks was annoyed with Mr. Jeremy.

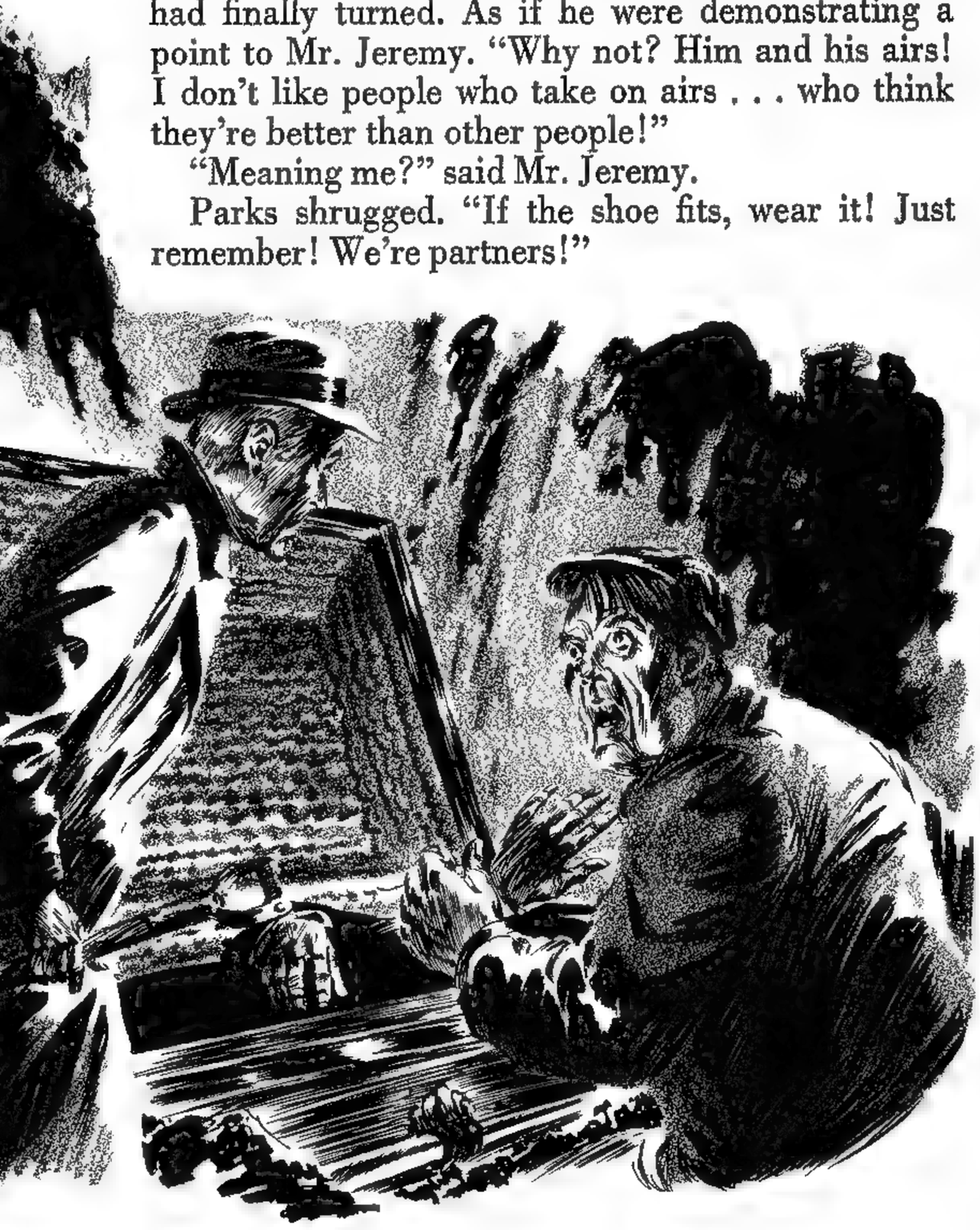
After he had taken the ring and the platinum watch, Parks bent one of Price's stiff arms double, thumb to nose . . .

"No! Don't!" Mr. Jeremy was shocked.

"Don't?" Parks's voice was soft, but threatening. Definitely threatening. As if, after all these years of taking orders from Mr. Jeremy, the worm had finally turned. As if he were demonstrating a point to Mr. Jeremy. "Why not? Him and his airs! I don't like people who take on airs . . . who think they're better than other people!"

"Meaning me?" said Mr. Jeremy.

Parks shrugged. "If the shoe fits, wear it! Just remember! We're partners!"



Mr. Jeremy felt ill. Partners, yes . . . now! But what about after? Mr. Jeremy could picture himself buried...and Parks's spade biting through the earth, prying up the lid of his coffin . . .

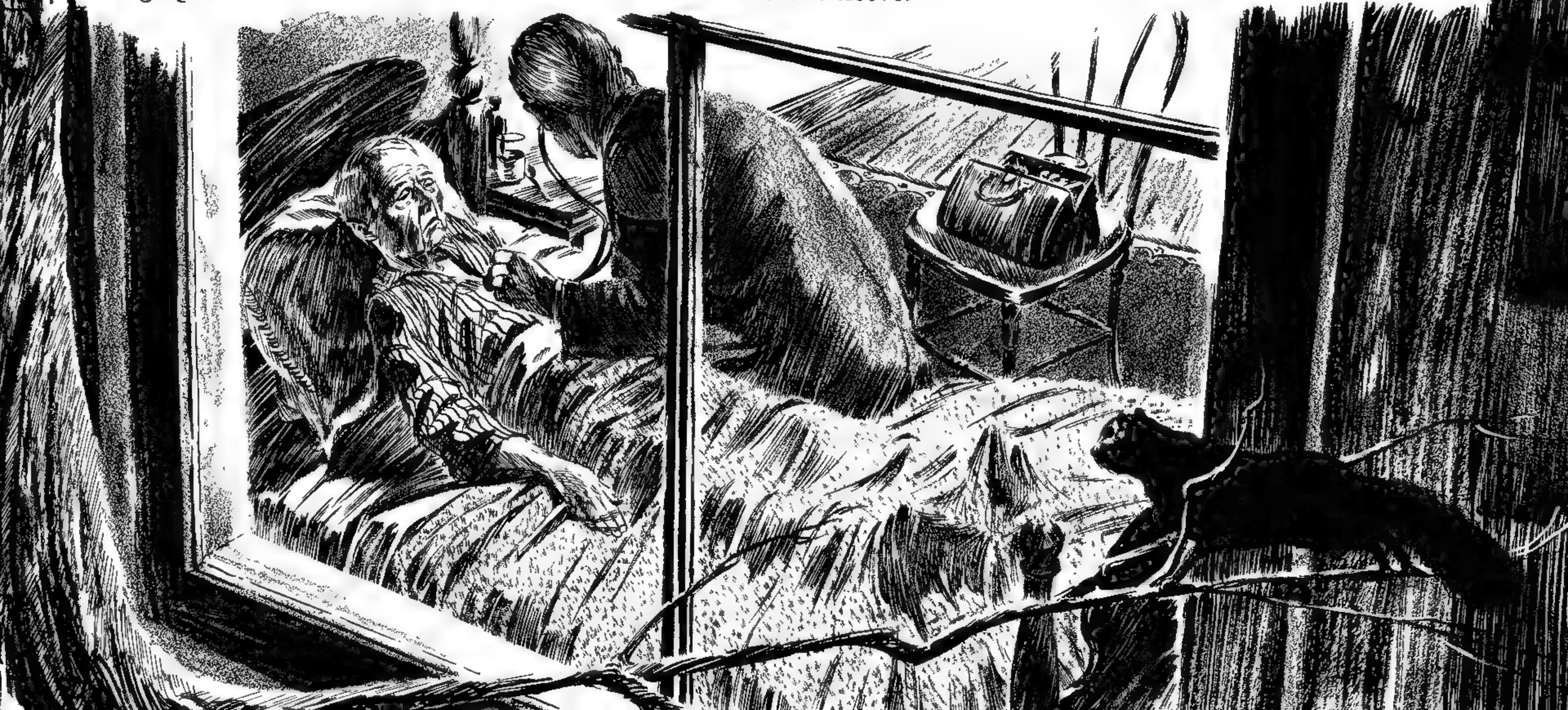
"Better buy a couple of new spades tomorrow," Parks snapped. "Long-handled! I'm sick of digging with these. They break your back!"

"You're not going to leave him like that?" cried Mr. Jeremy.

"Just like that!" Parks's laugh was coarse, vulgar. "Maybe you can go soft about a 'friend'! Me, I'm different!"

Oh, yes, Parks was different. Mr. Jeremy took a pill. All at once there was a nausea within him. But the pill did little good. He was still sick in the morning. Quite sick.

It took all of Dr. Blaine's ministerings to bring Mr. Jeremy around. He worked hard, trying this, trying that, trying to keep the breath of life in Mr. Jeremy's body. And all the while, Mr. Jeremy's eyes were upon the black mourning band sewn 'round the doctor's sleeve.



Not that Mr. Jeremy felt any twinges of remorse. One does not feel remorse concerning something which has become a way of life. Mr. Jeremy was only remembering: When he and Parks had opened the coffin in which the doctor's wife lay, Parks had become impatient in his efforts to remove the wedding band from her stiff finger. He'd raised his spade and brought it, slashing, down.

Mr. Jeremy had things to do. Painfully, slowly, so as not to place any undo strain in his rapidly beating heart, Mr. Jeremy donned his dignified clothing one morning and set out.

Stevens, the undertaker, greeted him warmly. But Mr. Jeremy was not visiting for the sake of exchanging small talk. He came directly to the point. He'd come to arrange a funeral.

"After all," he said, smiling wanly, "I'm not getting any younger."

Parks! Parks! Parks! Mr. Jeremy could think of nothing else. Parks . . . opening *his* grave! Parks . . . doing unspeakable things to *him!*

The doctor was astonished when Mr. Jeremy recovered . . . or seemed to. But then, he knew nothing of the indomitable will which lifted Mr. Jeremy from his sickbed. The doctor, poor man, mentally congratulated himself on having performed a near miracle.

Mr. Jeremy haggled. Not from lack of funds, but because of Parks. The casket he choose was of pine. The least expensive in Stevens's stock. No satin cushions. No bronze handles. Nothing, in a word, worth the effort it would cost Parks to disinter him. Mr. Jeremy intended to make certain.

Later, he visited his attorney. Mr. Jeremy had never considered a will to be essential. He had neither kith nor kin to mourn his passing. But a will seemed quite essential now.

"I am to be buried in my cheapest, most worn clothes," he instructed. "No jewelry, nothing of value."

Before nightfall, the town was already mourning Mr. Jeremy's passing, though the man still lived. If a man is so certain of death, those who surround him are not apt to question. And all knew of Mr. Jeremy's visits to the doctor . . . the doctor's visits to him.

Still, Mr. Jeremy did not die. Mr. Jeremy went on living. Nor did he neglect himself. Had not the doctor said he might live for years? Mr. Jeremy went on with his visits to the dentist . . . with his tender care of his aged carcass.

It was after one of his visits to the dentist that he met Parks. Parks grinned and said, "I heard about the will and the coffin. Getting ready? Playing it safe, aren't you?"

"Safe?" Mr. Jeremy acted innocent.

"Cheap coffin, no jewelry . . ." Parks had guessed. Parks was shrewd, as rats are sometimes shrewd. And amused. There was no point in Mr. Jeremy trying to deceive him.

"I've been making sure," said Mr. Jeremy, "that when I die, I'll be left alone. You wouldn't be fool enough to dig up a corpse without hope of profit."

"Sure, sure." Parks's smile was somehow lascivious. "But speaking of profit, I just came by the Willoughby house. I talked to Doc Blaine. The Willoughby kid probably won't last the day!"

"No!" This time, Mr. Jeremy's voice was almost a shriek. Not that he cared a fig about the Willoughby girl. He dared not exert himself. It might be fatal.

"When it happens, I'll let you know. And when I do, you come!" Parks's voice was caressing. "Willoughby has money!"

"You know as well as I do that the string of pearls he gave the kid for her sixteenth birthday is worth a pile. That he's not likely to bury her without them. And you never bought those long-handled spades. Bring 'em along."

"No!"

Parks shook his head. "Stubborn, aren't you? You come! Maybe you're fixin' to die . . . maybe not. But either way, we share! If we don't . . . well, it's only a little way from diggin' up a corpse to makin' one!"

Mr. Jeremy knew that Parks would not hesitate to kill, and that he still did not understand. Parks still suspected that Mr. Jeremy was somehow trying to cheat him. So there was really no way out. Mr. Jeremy purchased the new spades that afternoon.

And the Willoughby girl died the next morning. Mr. Jeremy attended the funeral. A pityful sight, with the girl's parents weeping bitterly. Mr. Jeremy was most consoling.

He was hardly interested when Parks opened the coffin and found the pearls, gleaming white against the more intense whiteness of the corpse's throat. Mr. Jeremy had dangled the Willoughby girl upon his knee in years gone by, but what did that matter now?

. . . *The dead are dead and the living must live* . . .

Only, Mr. Jeremy was dying. He fell to one knee on the fresh earth, clutching his heart.

But being a practical man, Mr. Jeremy did not attempt to find an escape for himself. There was none. So . . . *Heigh-ho, it is a dreary business* . . .

He presented himself at the cemetery gate-house that night with the two new spades, and he and Parks dug by the light of the moon. But, dig slowly as he might, the work was hard for Mr. Jeremy. Long before the new casket had been uncovered, he was breathing heavily and there was a dull ache in his

Parks looked up startled, and read the truth in Mr. Jeremy's pallid face. He worked swiftly after that, closing up the grave. Then he took Mr. Jeremy by the arm and half-led, half-dragged him away. It would never do to have Mr. Jeremy found in the cemetery.

At the door to his house, Mr. Jeremy rallied for a moment. He looked around for Parks and saw him, dimly, through a mist. Parks was staring at him.

"You really meant it," he said stupidly. "You really are sick!"

"I'm . . . already dead," gasped Mr. Jeremy. "But my dying . . . won't mean profit to you. Remember! There won't be . . . anything in my coffin! Only . . . me . . ."

And Mr. Jeremy was quite right. Masonville buried him quietly, with dignity. He smiled in his coffin under the earth, at rest.

Until the sound of metal on wood heralded the approach of something living. And after a while, a new, long-handled spade ripped the pine lid from Mr. Jeremy's simple casket and Parks stood grinning down at Mr. Jeremy's smile.

Parks said nothing. Only Mr. Jeremy thought he saw him smile. Then the night spun crazily and Mr. Jeremy fell. But, dying, he was content. They would take him to the cemetery quietly, in dignity, and in dignity, place him below the sod. And he would rest, undisturbed. He'd made certain . . .

. . . *The dead are dead* . . .

Mr. Jeremy had overlooked something.

From his pocket, Parks took a pair of heavy pliers, and bent, humming to his work.

There was quite a large amount of gold in those new fillings the dentist had put in Mr. Jeremy's teeth.

Heigh-ho . . .

THE END

MotherLove

Just ahead, at the end of the dimly lit corridor, was the door she had been seeking. Leona whimpered a little. Not from fear or agony this time, but from tenderness . . . eagerness. Beyond that door was her baby. The baby they had taken from her only moments after she had born it. The baby which was the doll she'd never owned. Something truly her own at last, upon which to lavish all the love and tenderness so long locked up within her.

Yet Leona did not rush blindly to the door. Somewhere she had found a nurse's cloak a dozen sizes too large for her small, undernourished body. She made a crouching, furtive blob as she moved, but she was not aware of that. She tip-toed slowly, every sense . . . the sharp, overdeveloped senses which Nature sometimes bestows upon the insane . . . alert. The hospital was small, and at this hour there was little likelihood of someone chancing by. But it was possible. So she crept slowly to the door beyond which was her baby . . .

She stood for a long time in the room, staring at her baby through the tears that filled her eyes. It was so small, so pink and white. When she picked it up, when she held it tight against her breast beneath the voluminous cloak, it seemed to her that her heart would burst. The wordless crooning that came softly from her lips was ageless, infinite.

But then there was no more time for tenderness. The hospital would be stirring soon. She found the front door and stepped into the small-town street.

That way! Leona remembered. When Clint had brought her, moaning and writhing in her agony, he had driven his splintered wagon up the street from the south. That meant the swamp lay that way.

Leona was a shadow, flitting down the deserted sidewalks, hugging her baby.

A mile down the highway which led out of town, there was a dirt road that turned off into the trees. That was where Clint had stopped the wagon to curse at her, to tell her to stop her eternal whining. She remembered. That was where he'd struck her one final blow, his calloused fingers slamming against her mouth, cutting off her moan of pain. She could remember so little. Yet, somehow, through the haze, she could remember everything that Clint had done to her. Everything!

The dirt road turned wet, and became mud. Ahead was the great swamp. The road vanished, after a while, and Leona did not know the safe trails.

Leeches clung to her legs, fattened on her blood, and dropped off. Muddy, brackish water, sometimes hip deep, stained her stolen dress. Vines and creepers ripped and scratched her. But these things were old acquaintances to Leona. She had been born in the swamp. She went on, cradling her baby beneath the protecting cloak.

Many times during the night, she stopped to look at her baby, to watch its tiny arms move, to croon senseless words of endearment to it. But always, that other urge, that other drive was there. By morning, she was standing beside the gnarled sycamore, whose tormented roots thrust themselves up out of the spongy ground not fifty yards from the cabin she had shared with Clint for so long.

Now she became cautious. No smoke poured from the mud chimney of the cabin. Nothing moved. She walked softly, carefully. It would not do to have Clint know that she was there . . . that she had returned. Not until she was ready. She wanted to surprise him, to see his face when he saw their baby for the first time. That was important.

But the cabin was empty. Clint wasn't there. He was probably out in the swamp, trapping. Leona slipped out of the filthy cloak. Then she sat, rocking, holding her child in her arms, waiting. Remembering.

Yes, she could remember everything about Clint, right from that very first day. The day Clint and her father had gotten drunk together . . .

* * * * * * * *

"Leona! Get out here and kiss your bridegroom!" her father had snarled in his drunken stupor. And that was how she'd met Clint.

Dumbly, obediently, she'd risen from the ragged blankets that served as her bed and came out of her father's cabin into the damp swamp night air. The words had meant nothing to her then. But to disobey meant a beating. So she'd stood, a moment later, not comprehending, while the big man with the thick-featured unshaven face walked around her, his bleary eyes traveling over her, grinning.

"She ain't smart, but she cooks good . . . an' she ain't a bad looker, eh, Clint?" Her father had been eager, anxious. "She'll make a good wife!"

"Yeah?" Clint had grinned stupidly. "Le'see . . ."

He'd reached out to pull her close to his sweating body, to fasten his mouth on hers.

And the reek of cheap whiskey had choked Leona . . . gagged her.

"Twenty dollars? For a gal that ain't got no more sense in her head than a three year old?"

"A woman don't need sense in the swamp! All she needs is a strong back!"

It had meant nothing to Leona when they haggled. But in the end, when half a dozen filthy dog-eared greenbacks had changed hands and Clint had started leading her toward his wagon, she'd been afraid. Afraid of this big man who looked at her so strangely. So she'd held back.

She'd struggled, and Clint had let her go, still grinning. But with a difference in his grin. With his pale eyes slitted in hungry anticipation.

"Spunky, eh?" he'd hissed. "Well, we'll fix that! Yeah! We'll sure fix that!"

"Twenty dollars ain't so much, Clint!" Her father had held out a half-filled bottle. "Come on, drink up, an' we'll call it a deal, huh?"

And she'd learned that this man was not like her father. Her father's blows were heavy when he rained them on her. They hurt. But this man's hand was a hammer! It snapped her head back on her shoulders, and dropped her, dazed, to the ground with a thin trickle of scarlet running from her lips.

"That'll learn you," he'd snarled, standing over her. "When I say move, you move!"

Leona'd looked toward her father for help, but she'd seen him with the bottle tilted to his lips, the whiskey running down his stubbled chin.

Then a bruising hand was on her arm, pulling her up, dragging her toward a wagon. And she'd gone, because she was alone and helpless.

Somewhere along the way, there was a cabin where for a dollar, a swamp preacher as bearded and filthy as Clint muttered a few words, and Clint's mouth fastened over hers for the second time. Only this time, Leona did not pull away. She could still feel his hammer blow.

"You can learn, anyway, can't you?" Clint had grinned, pleased.

And that part had not been so bad. It was what had come later . . .

The nightmare began in the dirty cabin that was to be Leona's home. The night sounds, the shriek of the hunting hawk, the eternal hum of the insects, all had been counterpoint to Leona's screams when Clint had seized her.

He'd not grinned then. His eyes had been bloodshot and slitted, and he'd muttered:

"You're my wife, now! My wife! Do you understand?"

His fingers had wound themselves in her hair when she'd tried to flee his embrace.

"So you don't like me, eh? That's good!" He'd laughed. An animal laugh. "Well, I don't like things that come too easy, anyhow! Now, you c'mere . . ."

Leona had been sick in the morning. Horribly, agonizingly sick. Hurt. But Clint had been suffering the after-effects of the cheap rotten whiskey he'd consumed the night before. He'd been in no mood to hear her complaints. He'd been rat-mean. His big hands had beaten her almost senseless, so that she'd finally cooked his breakfast, dragging herself . . .

After that, it was as if that first night was a pattern. Leona learned. She learned to avoid the casual kicks, the casual slaps.

But sometimes, they were not casual. Sometimes Clint would seek her out deliberately, as if in tormenting her, he could relieve the brutal squalor which was all he had ever known. As if, in making Leona's life a horror, he could make his own less of a horror.

Not that Leona thought of her life as a horror. Her mind was not capable of that. Leona knew only that there was a lack in the scheme of things.

How could she know that what she yearned for was something to love?

Once, she made a doll out of some rags and string. Because it felt good to hold it in her arms. Clint found her sitting on the floor, cradling it. And he laughed at her.

But when she did not react, when she did not comprehend that he was ridiculing her, he tore the doll from her arms and thrust it into the pot-bellied stove to be consumed, laughing as he watched the tears stream down her face.

Leona had tried to tell him about the nausea, the pains. But her words had been disjointed. Clint had left her lying there.

And it had happened again . . . and again . . .

One night, his eyes had taken in the slight thickening of her body. And his fist had slammed down on the table in angry realization.

"A baby! That's it!" he'd shouted. "A baby! Now you won't be worth a durn to me!"

It was a month later that he began to look at her queerly. After she'd fainted for the first time, while she was carrying the heavy bucket of water from the well to the cabin. Suddenly, the earth had seemed to spin up to meet her. And when she'd opened her eyes, she'd been dripping wet and Clint had been standing over her, the empty bucket in his hands.

"All right! What ails you?" he'd sneered.

Brats were not part of Clint's plans. Before, he had been cruel, brutal. Now, he was a devil. A woman with child was not only ugly; she was useless! And he'd paid hard cash for Leona!

From then on, his blows and kicks were slyly directed, designed to inflict more than one kind of pain. Only Clint went too far. There was a time when Leona did not move from her bed. Despite the blows. A time when she lay rocking back and forth in her agony, day after day, night after night. When even Clint left her alone to suffer the tortures of the damned physically, while her poor hurt brain soared.

A baby! A little thing all her own to love and care for! Leona dreamed through her torments in a half-world that was all softness and love. Soon . . . soon . . . her child would lie in her arms, against her heart. Soon the emptiness there would be filled. Such warm, sweet thoughts.

Leona did not know that, even as she dreamed, her body writhed. But Clint knew. Knew . . . and began to be afraid. Even in the swamp, there was law. If Leona died, there would be questions. There would be those who would want to know . . . about the marks . . . the bruises.

It was almost Leona's time when he decided upon a course of action. Outside, a storm had left the swamp trails dangerous and treacherous, but it had to be risked.

When Clint hitched the horse to his wagon, he was almost glad that the trails would be dangerous. That way, there would be less chance of meeting another swamper.

Leona moaned softly when he carried her to the wagon and tumbled her into it. Her eyes were closed, hidden by the matted hair which clung to the perspiration on her face. But her eyes did not remain closed. And her moans grew louder, louder . . .

Clint's whip was a blur. There was little time. But lashing his horse did no good. The tortured beast slipped in the mud. The wheels sank again and again, so that Clint had to climb down and set his shoulder to them. By the time they reached the highway, Leona's moans were clearly audible.

"Shut up!" he snarled, slapping her hard. "Shut up, blast you! I don't want anybody askin' any questions!"

Leona was conscious then. She bit back the moans. No sound came from her as the wagon creaked up the empty streets. She hung limply in Clint's arms when he lifted her, carried her up the steps of the tiny small-town hospital.

Clint left her there on the steps, a shadow among other shadows. Let them try to figure it out! His wagon creaked back the way it had come. Leona would not be able to tell them anything. Not incoherent Leona! He was safe!

Nor *could* Leona tell them anything when they found her in the morning. The night had been long and black with pain. What little reason remained to her had gone forever, shattered into a thousand disjointed screaming fragments. Only two thoughts were left in her muddled mind. The baby . . . and Clint. One thought tender, loving . . . the other hard, hateful.

They were kind in the hospital. Gentle hands lifted Leona up, stripped off the rags she wore, bathed her. Gentle voices murmered sympathetically:

"Lord! Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Poor little thing!"

"Why she's only a baby herself!"

"A swamper, from the looks of her!"

"No!" Leona tried to scream. Her baby! They were taking it away! She tried to struggle, to fight. But the drugs, the sedatives were powerful. They kept her pressed down upon the white sheets, silent and helpless to stop them.

After a while, there were bright lights . . . a rolling stretcher . . . a bare room, dazzling in its white cleanliness . . . shiny chrome and steel instruments.

Then there was someone holding the tiny morsel of pink . . . taking it away.

It was later that Leona screamed and would not stop screaming. After they had taken her to her room. It was then that women with broad straps came and forced her back onto the iron bed, and then stood looking down at her, pityingly, shaking their heads.

They took the straps off, eventually. They came and talked to her . . . about herself . . . about her baby. But they did not bring her baby to her. And Leona knew, after a while, that they never would bring her baby to her. And so she waited.

She made no plans. There were just . . . just two things she had to do. The first, she'd done earlier that night. She'd crept through the silent corridors, she'd taken a dress and a nurse's cloak, and she'd found her baby . . .

* * * * * * * *

Now, there was the other thing that had to be done.

Somewhere outside, a twig cracked.

Clint!

Gently, Leona placed her baby on the bed. She was waiting behind the door when Clint came into the cabin.

He was drunk again. Reeking. But even he seemed to sense that she was there.

He turned, and Leona moved forward, the kitchen knife she'd taken from the table in her hands. There was no fear in her now. She circled him, warily. And Clint turned with her, stupidly.

"You . . ." he muttered. "You came back! You were going to have a baby . . ."

His eyes focused, went past Leona, to the bed. He could see the baby now. His mouth opened . . . then closed.

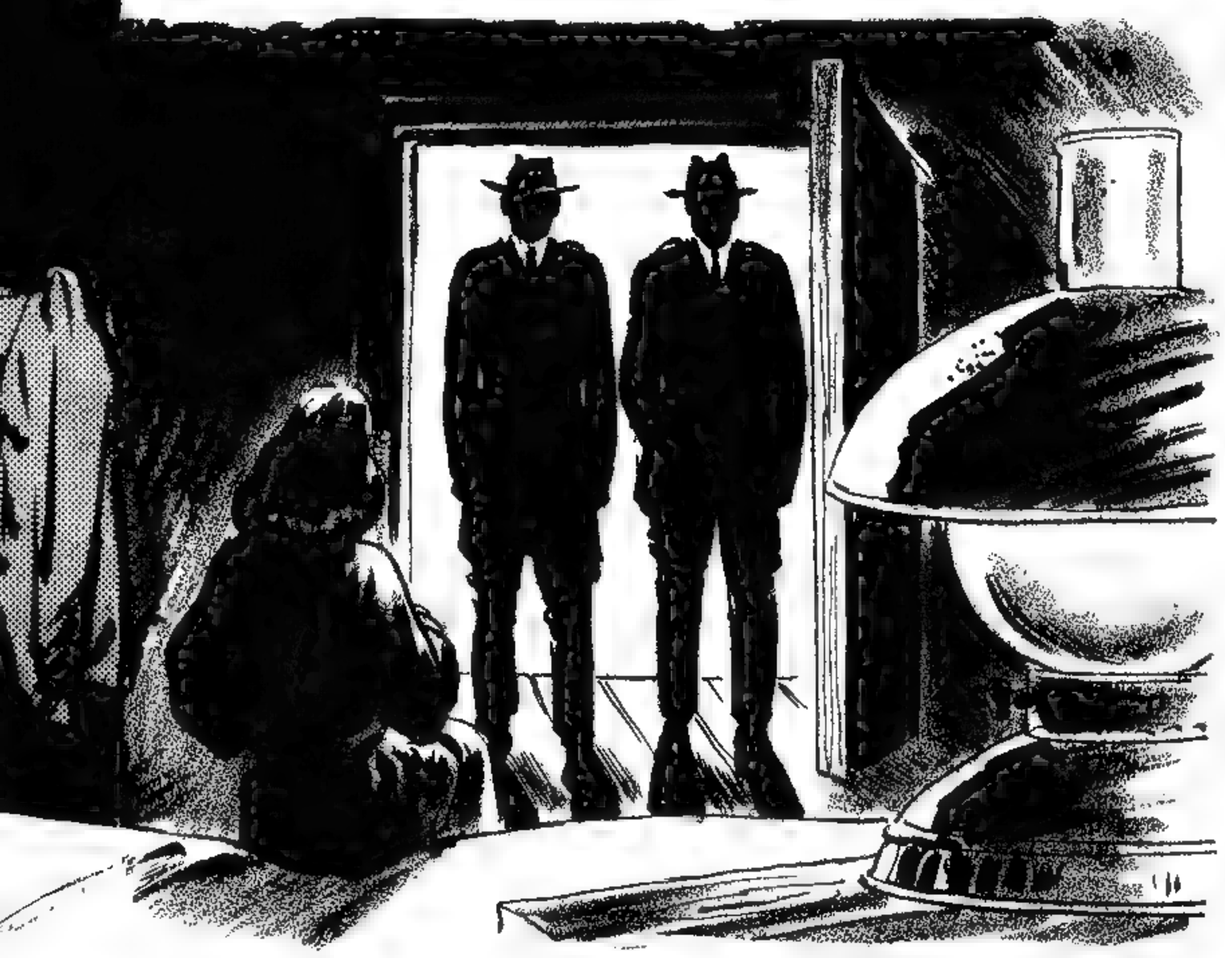
It was then that Leona drove the knife into his throat. Clint staggered, gurgling, but she followed. The knife drove home again. Again. And again.

He slipped to the floor and she stood over him, staring down at him, feeling purged and clean and free.

It was a long time before she dropped the knife and went back to her baby on the bed.

Clint was forgotten then. The baby moved restlessly when she picked it up. Only the baby mattered. Leona held it close, content.

The troopers found her so. Two of the men who were part of the dragnet scouring the swamp for her stood in the doorway staring, sickened, at the thing which had been Clint, and at Leona and her baby.



She fought them when they took her baby away from her. But they had expected that. In the end, one of them held her helpless, while the other went out to the radio on their car.

Leona was quiet when the doctor came from the hospital. As if all her small store of will had been consumed in bringing her this far. She stared across the room at her baby . . . the only thing she had ever loved . . .

But the doctor and the troopers who stood over Clint's body knew none of that. The doctor turned away, white. "God!" he whispered.

"Pretty messy, eh, Doc?" one of the troopers muttered. "I guess you'd better take the baby back to the hospital. We'll take the woman."

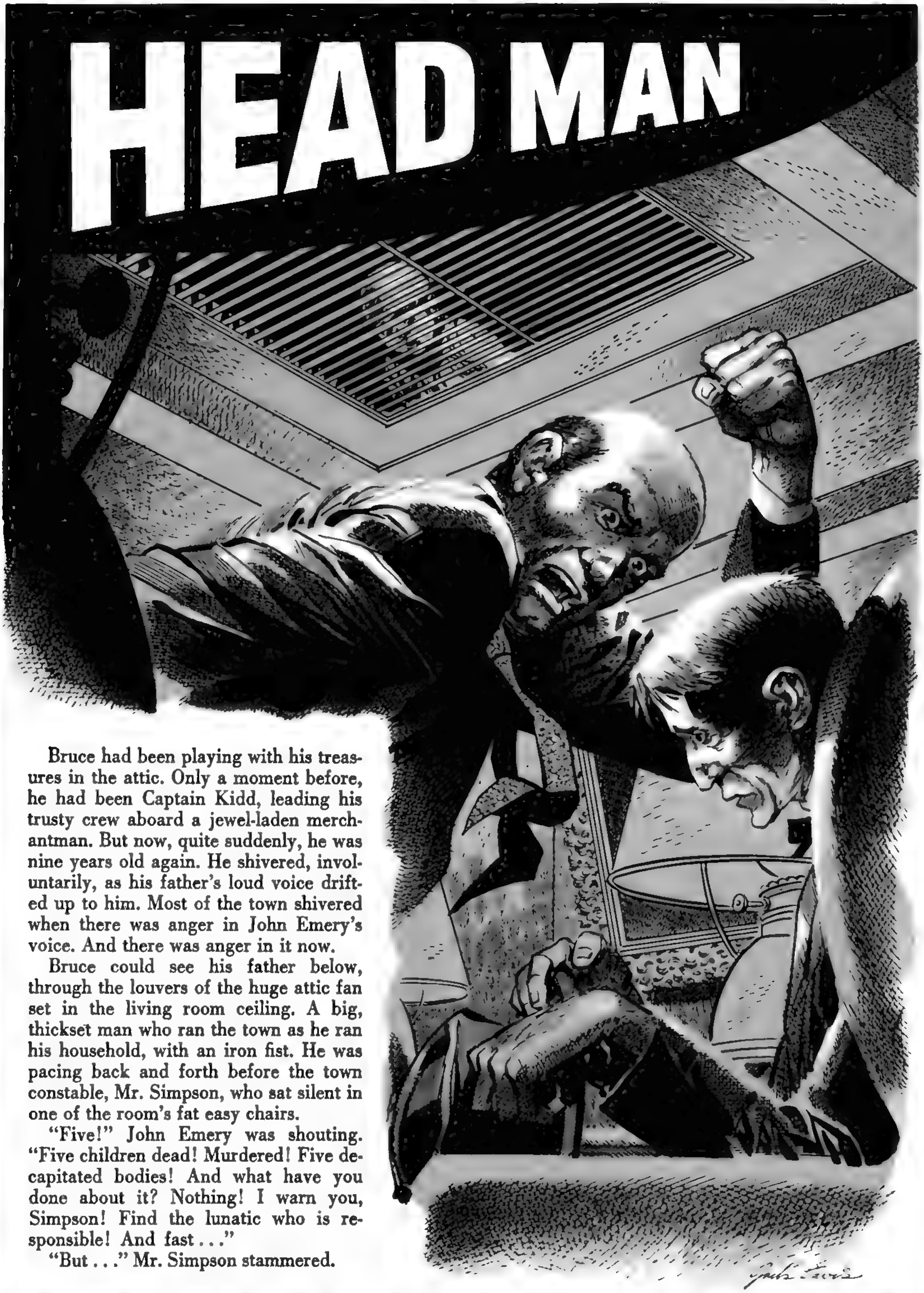
"Yes, I guess so!" The doctor nodded, but his eyes were back on Clint. "God!" he said again. "Poor devil. I wonder what he ever did to deserve winding up like that . . ."

But there was no answer and it was growing late. The doctor had to get back to the hospital. The trooper led Leona outside and the doctor followed, carrying the baby.

The baby that was a misshapen pink and white horror. The end-product of a thousand blows and kicks. A thing to make strong men wince and turn away, moving restlessly in the jar of formaldehyde into which its grotesquely deformed body had been placed only moments after it had been still-born.

THE END

HEAD MAN



Bruce had been playing with his treasures in the attic. Only a moment before, he had been Captain Kidd, leading his trusty crew aboard a jewel-laden merchantman. But now, quite suddenly, he was nine years old again. He shivered, involuntarily, as his father's loud voice drifted up to him. Most of the town shivered when there was anger in John Emery's voice. And there was anger in it now.

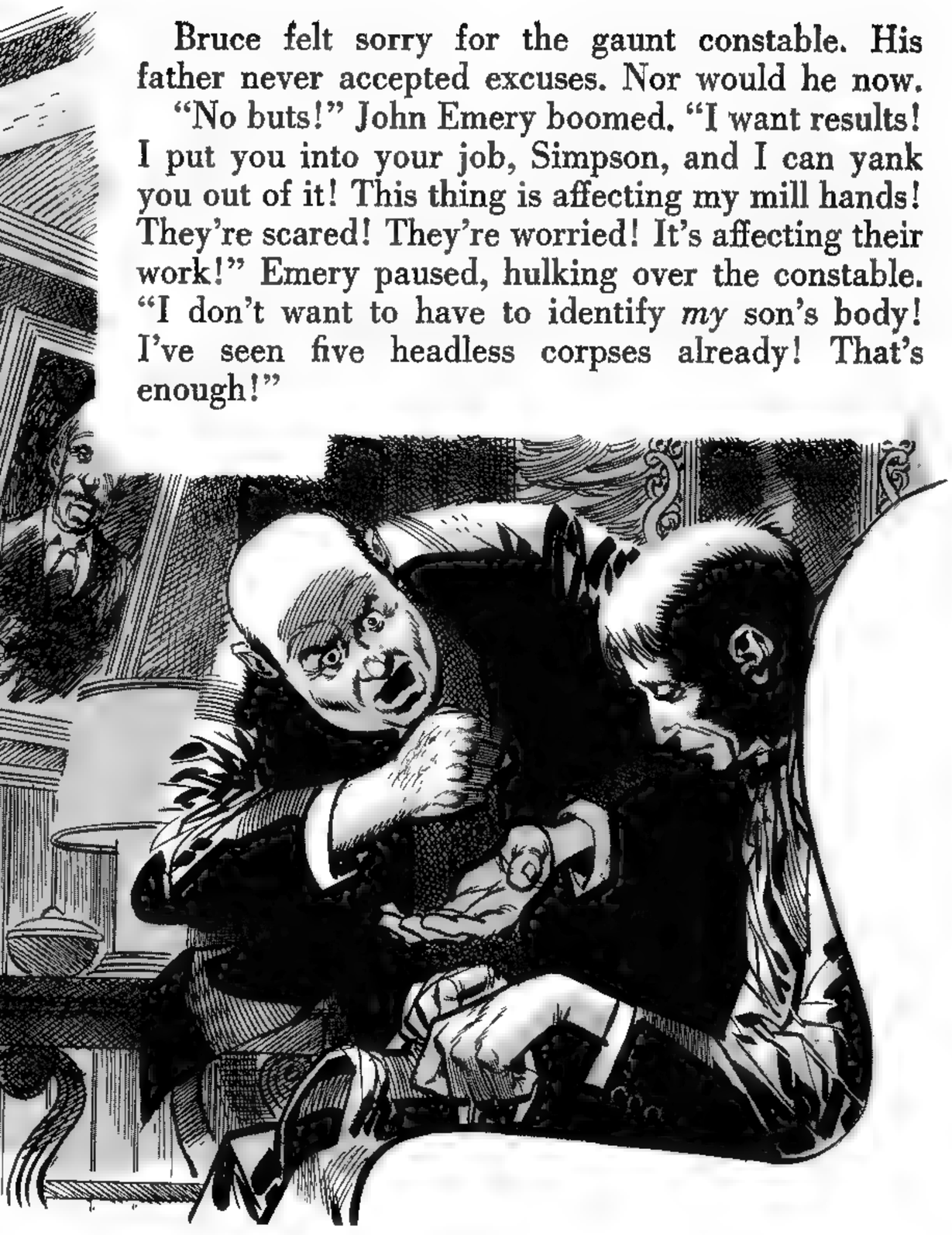
Bruce could see his father below, through the louvers of the huge attic fan set in the living room ceiling. A big, thickset man who ran the town as he ran his household, with an iron fist. He was pacing back and forth before the town constable, Mr. Simpson, who sat silent in one of the room's fat easy chairs.

"Five!" John Emery was shouting. "Five children dead! Murdered! Five decapitated bodies! And what have you done about it? Nothing! I warn you, Simpson! Find the lunatic who is responsible! And fast . . ."

"But . . ." Mr. Simpson stammered.

Bruce felt sorry for the gaunt constable. His father never accepted excuses. Nor would he now.

"No buts!" John Emery boomed. "I want results! I put you into your job, Simpson, and I can yank you out of it! This thing is affecting my mill hands! They're scared! They're worried! It's affecting their work!" Emery paused, hulking over the constable. "I don't want to have to identify *my* son's body! I've seen five headless corpses already! That's enough!"



He went out, his eyes shadowed, twisting his battered old felt hat in his thin hands.

Bruce returned to his treasures, considering. After all, his father hadn't yet *told* him he was forbidden to leave the house after sundown. If he went out, it wouldn't be as if he was being disobedient!

With his penknife, he pried up the attic floorboard beneath which he stored his things.

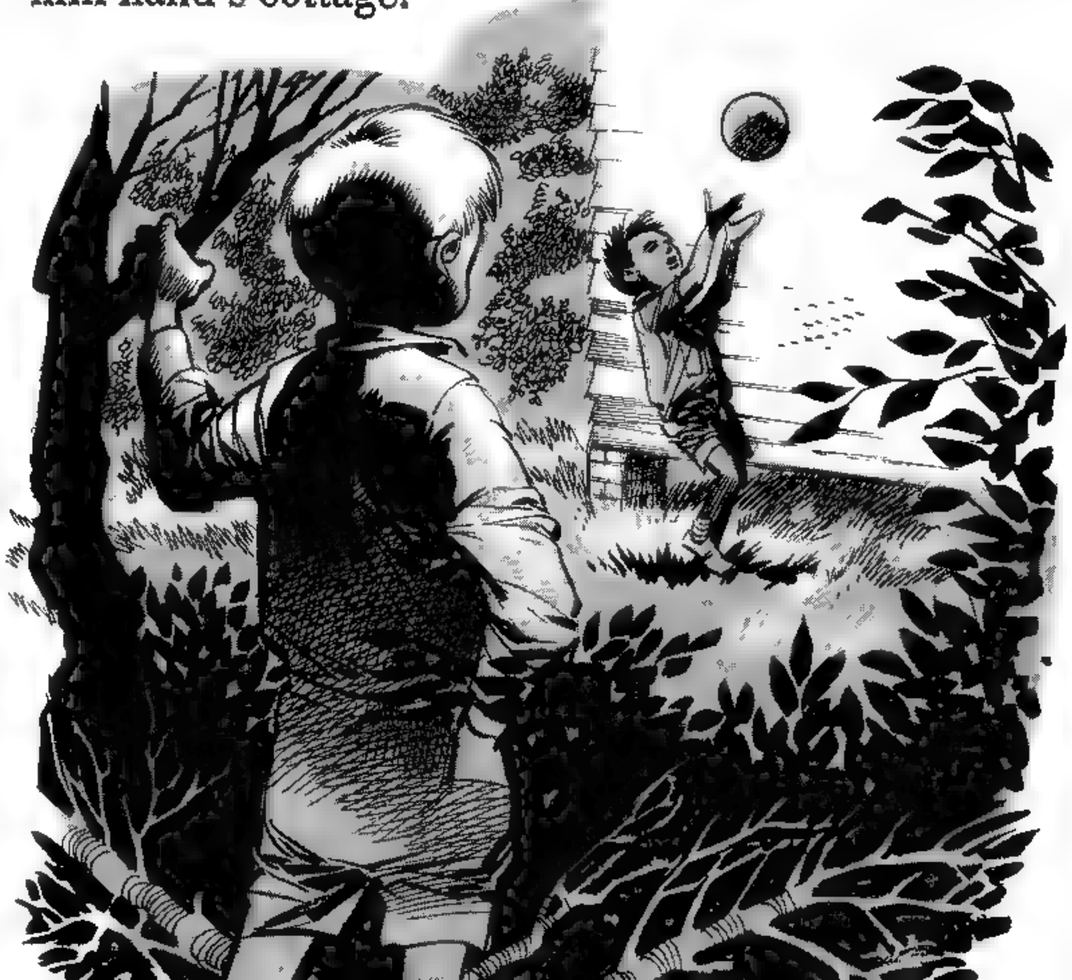
Bruce shivered again. The grown-ups thought he didn't know about the murders. But he'd heard them whispering.

"Make a set of temporary laws," his father went on. "See to it that no child is allowed out after sundown. Do *something!* I'll certainly see to it that my own boy stays in the house. I can't depend on you!"

"Yes, Mr. Emery," the constable rose.

His father would disapprove of the lizard, the slingshot, and the other prized possessions which meant so much to Bruce. His father disapproved of almost everything.

He went out the back way, through the well-kept garden. Grown-ups! Huh! He was Captain Kidd, Richard the Lion-Hearted, Kit Carson! What did he have to fear? But there was something in the air. The town was too quiet, too still. Bruce didn't like it. He was glad when he spied a boy of about his age aimlessly tossing a ball against the wooden side of a mill hand's cottage.



In moments, he had made friends, and was playing a game of catch with the other boy.

It lasted only a little while, though. The afternoon shadows were lengthening and the stillness of the town was becoming thick, oppressive. The other boy's parents emerged from their home and shooed Bruce's new-found friend indoors.

"You're the Emery boy," said the mother, turning to him. "You'd better run along home, now. Your father . . ."

She bit that off. But Bruce knew. His father didn't like him playing with the children of the mill hands. They weren't good enough for him!

"Not that there's anything wrong with kids of mill hands, Bruce," he would say. "But after all, *you're* John Emery's *son!*"

It was almost dark now. Part of the way home, Bruce skipped. That was when he was on horseback. Part of the way, he walked with an exaggerated rolling gait. That was aboard a schooner in the South Seas. He was only a few blocks from home when he became aware of the shadow behind him.

The shadow was a man. That much he could see in the gloom. But when he stopped, when he waited for the shadow to catch up, the man stopped too.

Bruce quickened his pace. The shadow quickened its pace. Bruce slowed. The shadow slowed.

The panic came suddenly. Suddenly, Bruce was running. Whatever it was, whoever it was, it was after him! He ran blindly, wildly, with sudden tears of fright running down his face and into his open, gasping mouth. And the shadow followed.

If only there were someone in the street. But there was no one. No one! He was alone! Alone in the world with that! That thing that hunted him!

But home was just ahead! Run! Run! Through the gate! Up the walk! Through the door! Into the heavy, reassuring presence of his father . . . the comforting embrace of his mother's arms.

"Bruce, where have you been?" His father began a tirade, but was cut short by his mother.

"John, he's terrified!" Her arms closed tighter about him. "Darling, what is it? What happened?"

"Man . . . outside . . . ran . . . after . . . me . . ." The gasping words were strangled, quavered with fear.

There was a gun in a bureau drawer. Mr. Emery was carrying it when he went outside . . . when he met the constable coming up the walk.

"Evenin', Mr. Emery," said Mr. Simpson. "Bruce get home all right? I spotted him in town and followed him to keep an eye on him, but I guess he got scared an' ran."

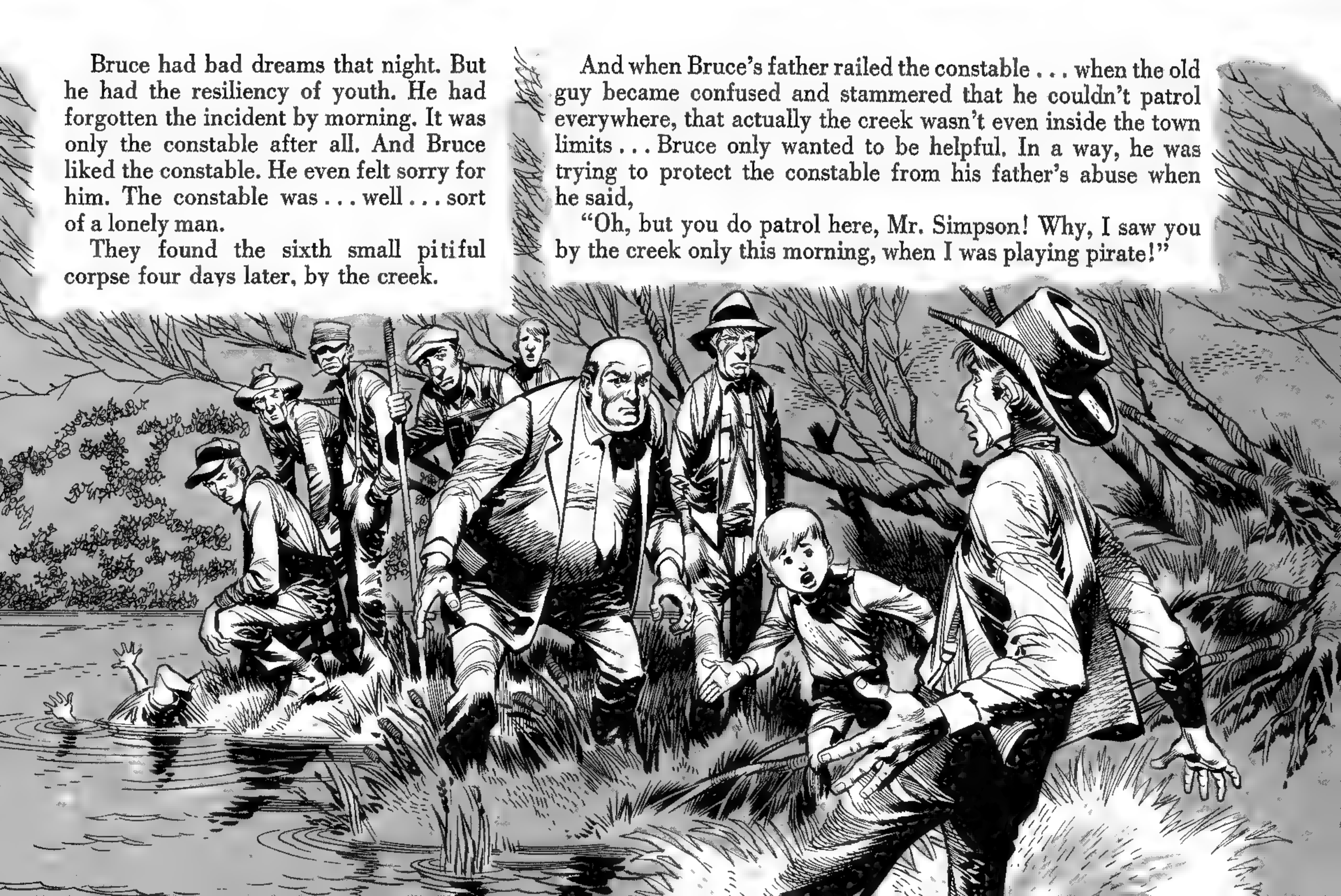
"So it was *you!*" Emery's face was hidden in darkness, but his voice gave away the fact that he did not quite accept, did not quite believe the constable's words. "I see. Yes, he got home all right. Thank you . . . Mr. Simpson."

Bruce had bad dreams that night. But he had the resiliency of youth. He had forgotten the incident by morning. It was only the constable after all. And Bruce liked the constable. He even felt sorry for him. The constable was . . . well . . . sort of a lonely man.

They found the sixth small pitiful corpse four days later, by the creek.

And when Bruce's father railed the constable . . . when the old guy became confused and stammered that he couldn't patrol everywhere, that actually the creek wasn't even inside the town limits . . . Bruce only wanted to be helpful. In a way, he was trying to protect the constable from his father's abuse when he said,

"Oh, but you do patrol here, Mr. Simpson! Why, I saw you by the creek only this morning, when I was playing pirate!"



Bruce did his best, but that only seemed to confuse Mr. Simpson more. The old man muttered something about how he meant that he couldn't be everywhere *all* the time, and turned away. The little crowd that had gathered parted to let him by.

"I wonder," said John Emery, watching the old guy move up the bank. "Simpson always was sort of . . . peculiar. I wonder . . ."

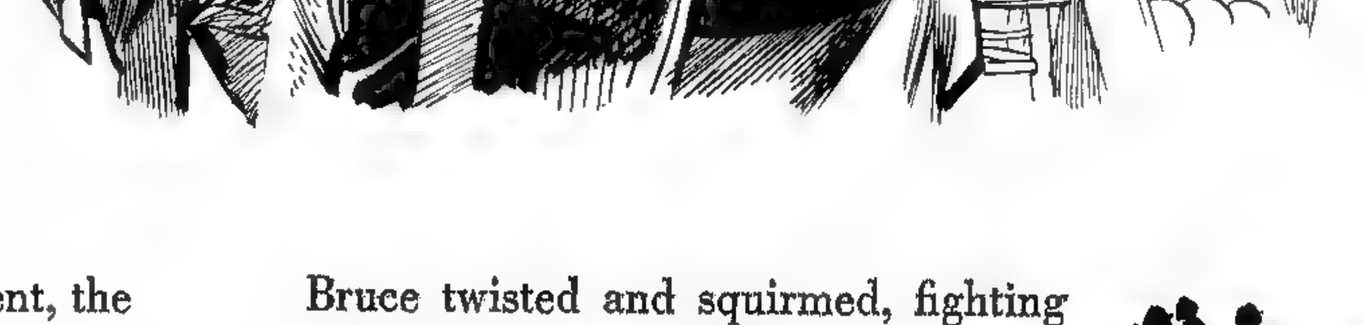
But it seemed to Bruce thereafter that wherever he went, the constable was there too, studying him, staring at him.

It happened while Bruce was in the park, watching some mill kids playing ball and wishing that he could dare over-ride his father's veto and join them. As he walked sadly away, Mr. Simpson stepped out from behind a tree.

"I want to talk to you," he hissed, and grasped Bruce's arm roughly, hauling him into the brush.

Lots of times, afterward, Bruce saw how people looked oddly at Mr. Simpson . . . and how oddly Mr. Simpson looked at *him*.

"Keep away from him," his father warned him. And when Bruce asked why, he added: "Never mind why! Folks in this town are beginning to get some mighty queer ideas about old Simpson. You just stay away from him!"



Bruce twisted and squirmed, fighting free just as Mr. Cooper, the grocer, came up the path.

The grocer was not a particularly brave man, but to him the scene spoke for itself. He saw the tearful boy struggling with the grim-faced snarling old man, and he came at a run, shouting: "Let him go! So it *was* you! Let him go! MURDERER!"

In moments, there were others, all converging on the startled old man. Mr. Simpson hesitated . . . and then he ran. As the others came, they snatched up pieces of wood, stones. They fanned out, howling. And they hunted him.

But the constable managed to elude them. The men took Bruce home.

"I knew it," said John Emery. "My boy gave him away . . . so he wanted to kill him! Like he killed the others! Well, we know who we're after, now!"

Bruce's father was good at organizing, and the townsmen were sheep to be led. Angry sheep, afraid for their young. Mr. Simpson was doomed at that moment. Emery got his gun and the crowd went baying down Main Street toward the old constable's house.

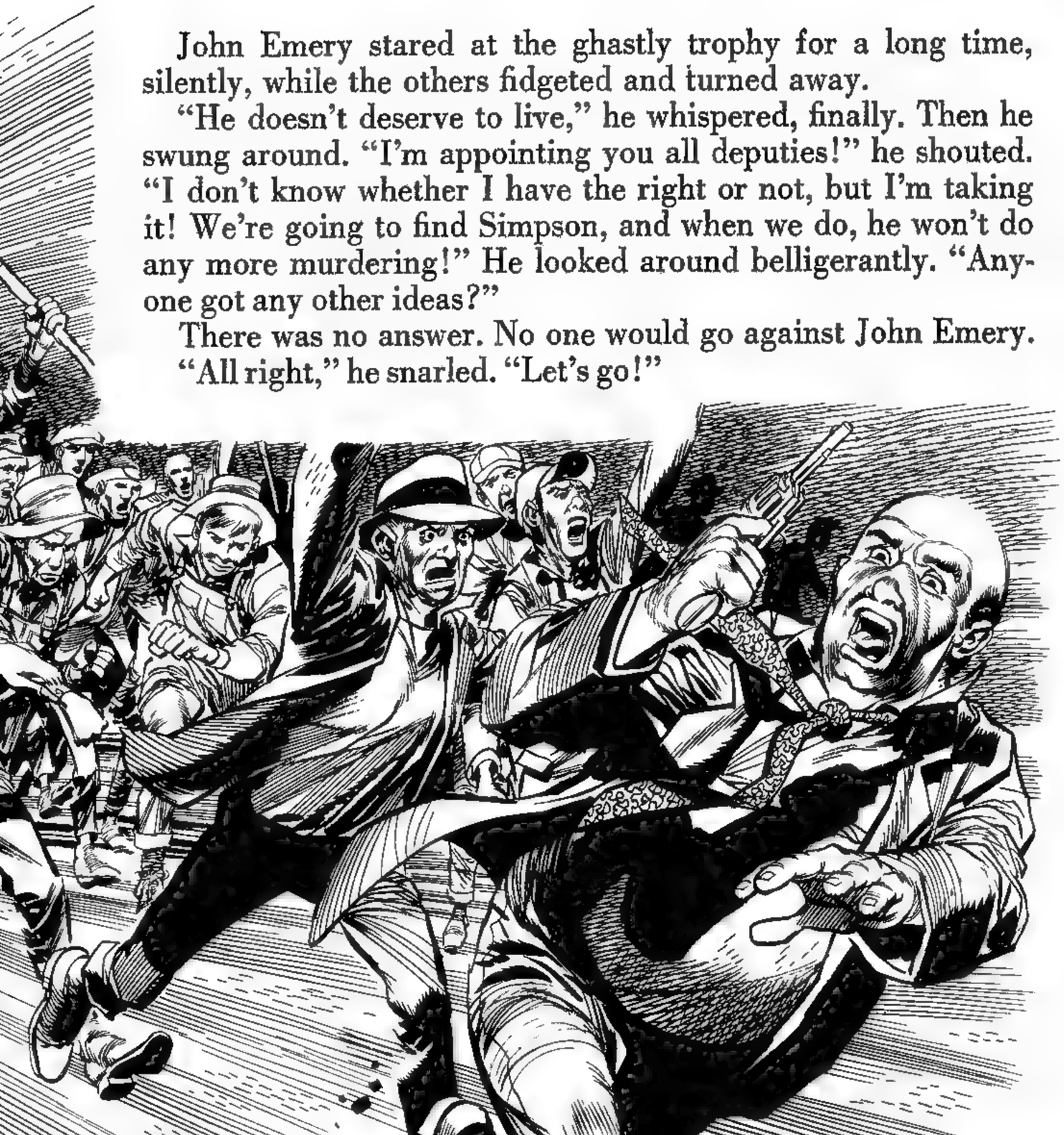
He wasn't there, of course. So the men ransacked the house. In a drawer, carefully wrapped in a stained napkin, they found the head of the Hayes boy, the one whose body had been left by the creek.

John Emery stared at the ghastly trophy for a long time, silently, while the others fidgeted and turned away.

"He doesn't deserve to live," he whispered, finally. Then he swung around. "I'm appointing you all deputies!" he shouted. "I don't know whether I have the right or not, but I'm taking it! We're going to find Simpson, and when we do, he won't do any more murdering!" He looked around belligerantly. "Anyone got any other ideas?"

There was no answer. No one would go against John Emery.

"All right," he snarled. "Let's go!"



Outside, Bruce was waiting. He still felt sorry for old Mr. Simpson, but this was too good to miss. The excitement of it.

"Go home," his father told him. "Now! Get into the house and stay there! And don't stop on the way!"

Bruce started, but he went only as far as the corner. Other kids were following the men! Why shouldn't he? They made room for him in their ranks when he caught up, but no one spoke to him. He was John Emery's son. Their parents had told them often to keep away from Bruce. Mr. Emery didn't like having Bruce mingle with them, and *their* fathers weren't anxious to lose their jobs in Emery's mill.

So, among many, Bruce saw it all. The men stopped at the edge of town only long enough to split into small groups. These spaced themselves out, each several hundred yards separated from the next, and began to move slowly forward. There was open ground here, thick with tall summer grass. A man could hide in it, but not from a line of angry men beating every square inch as they advanced.

A mile from town, Simpson stood up from his hiding place. He stood in plain sight, his face streaked with perspiration, and shouted at them. But his words were jumbled at that distance. The line of men, drawn by John Emery, came on. It was Emery himself who picked up the jagged stone and threw it.

"Murderer!" he screamed. "We don't want to hear your mealy-mouthed pleas for mercy!"

Simpson turned, his face white with terror, and fled. A hail of stones rained down upon him as he scampered wildly through the tall grass. When Emery remembered his gun, it was too late. Simpson was a bad target. The shot missed.

Only the others hadn't expected gunfire! It sobered them. One by one, they came to a halt. This wasn't a job for honest citizens. Left to themselves, they'd have turned back. Let the State Police find Simpson.

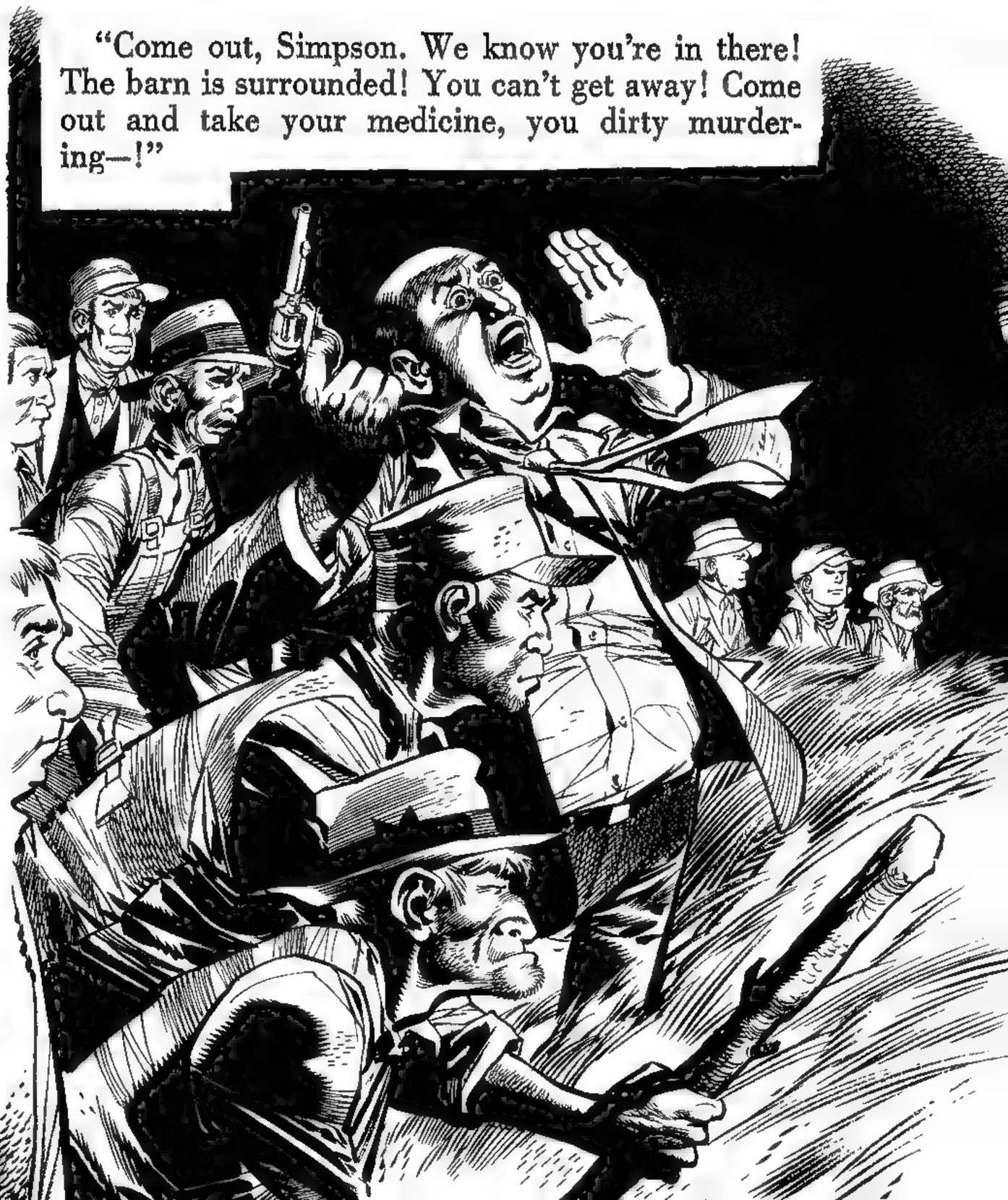
"Cowards!" John Emery stood before them, raging. "You're afraid of him, aren't you? No wonder you're all nobodies! He kills your children! But that isn't enough! He mutilates them! And you hang back! He's an animal, and you hesitate! He doesn't belong in the same world with decent men, and you'd let him go free! You'd eliminate a mad dog, but you'd let a killer like Simpson escape to kill again!"

"C'mon. What are we waiting for?"

"Yeah. Let's go!"

Here and there, a voice took up the chorus. Some, because the fire of Emery's rhetoric had taken hold of them; some, because John Emery was a powerful man, not to be defied. The men moved together, coalesced into a unit. As a unit, they were powerful, without fear.

The mob was a single beast with many bodies and only one brain, then. John Emery's brain. It was he who led them across the fields. It was he who, when they approached the deserted barn standing desolate among the weeds, reasoned that that was where Simpson would hide. It was he who cupped his hand to his mouth after the men had surrounded the barn and shouted into the wind:

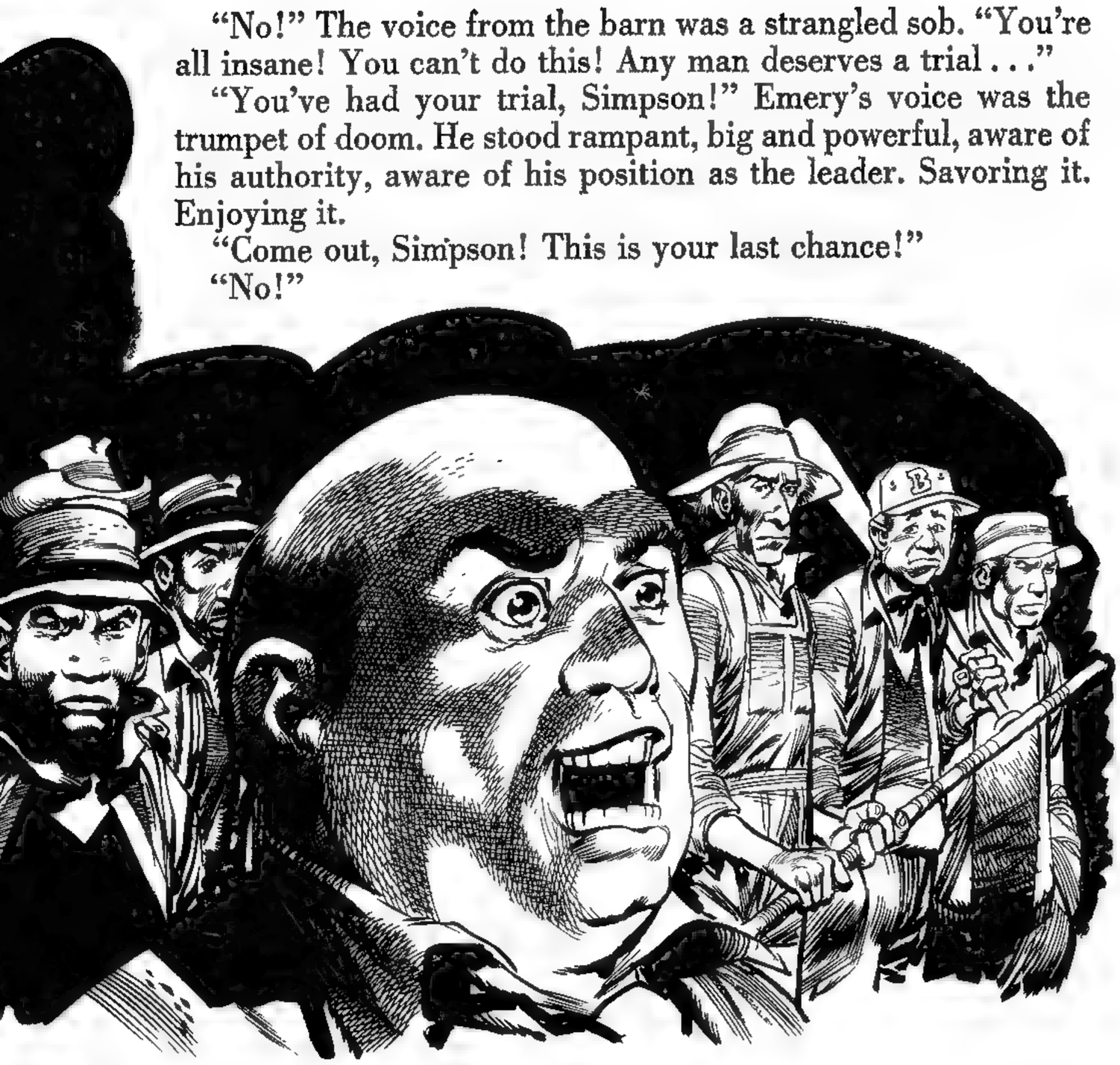

"Come out, Simpson. We know you're in there! The barn is surrounded! You can't get away! Come out and take your medicine, you dirty murdering—!"

"No!" The voice from the barn was a strangled sob. "You're all insane! You can't do this! Any man deserves a trial . . ."

"You've had your trial, Simpson!" Emery's voice was the trumpet of doom. He stood rampant, big and powerful, aware of his authority, aware of his position as the leader. Savoring it. Enjoying it.

"Come out, Simpson! This is your last chance!"

"No!"



The first puff of orange flame told Bruce what was happening. It was like the Fourth of July at the Fair Grounds. First, a single bit of brightness. Then others, spreading, mingling, until the barn was a giant torch, with the men dancing around it like Indians, drunk with what they had done.

Bruce could see his father from the distance where he had come to a halt with the other kids. He could see his father go into a hurried consultation with the others and then see the men walk to the tinder-dry walls of the old barn.

Bruce felt sick. Mr. Simpson had been inside the barn. Only there was no barn now. There was just a pile of charred, smoking, black ruins, and the men were walking away from it, one by one. The reaction had already set in and the horror of their act was beginning to take its creeping course through each individual conscience. The town would never be the same after today.

But Bruce did not know that. He felt sick, and then normalcy began to assert itself. His father would be furious if he were not home when he got there. In the world of a nine year old, the immediate is far more important than the past. And Mr. Simpson was already in the past.

Bruce turned and scampered for home.

Susan Emery was seated in silence in the living room when he entered. Word of what had taken place had already spread. But she did not condemn nor condone. Fifteen years of John Emery's overbearance had long since turned her into a pale shadow in the light of his arrogance.

"Well, say it!" He stood before her, waiting.

"Say, what, John?" She did not look up.

"What you're thinking! That we should have let the law take its course! That we had no right to take the law into our own hands!"

"Well, *did* you have the right, John?" She studied him.

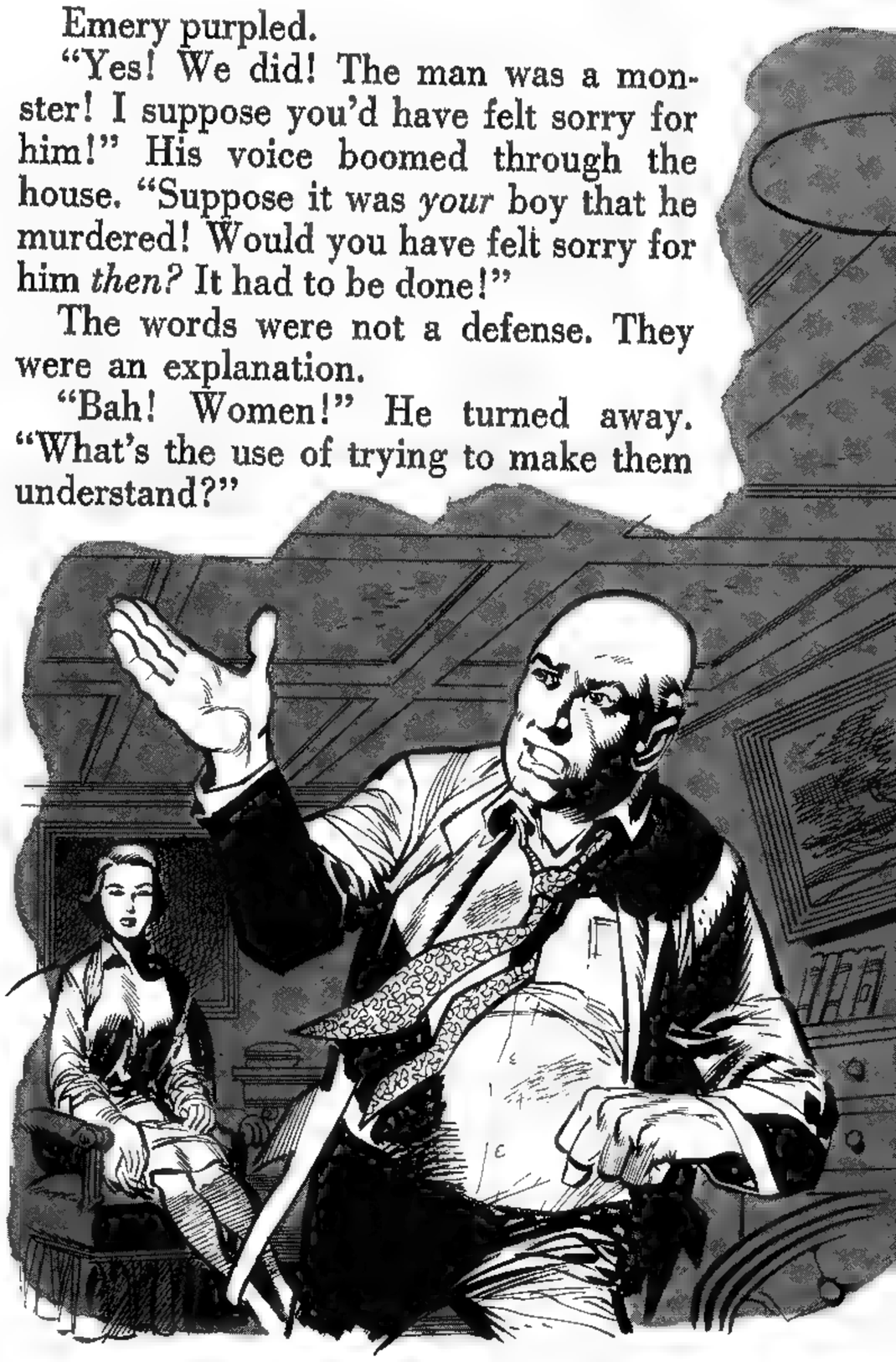
John Emery was the last to leave. The rest of the mob had slunk away, but he was made of sterner stuff. He was smiling as he crossed the fields, although he was not aware of his smile. He felt satisfied in a way that he did not attempt to classify. Power was a wonderful thing, he might have thought . . . if he'd bothered to think about his emotion at all.

Emery purpled.

"Yes! We did! The man was a monster! I suppose you'd have felt sorry for him!" His voice boomed through the house. "Suppose it was *your* boy that he murdered! Would you have felt sorry for him *then?* It had to be done!"

The words were not a defense. They were an explanation.

"Bah! Women!" He turned away. "What's the use of trying to make them understand?"



From above, a thin stream of dust sifted down. Emery looked up at the attic fan.

"Bruce! Are you up in that filthy attic again?"

"Yes, father!" Through the louvers, Bruce could see his father's angry face.

"Get down here! I've told you a hundred times that I don't want you playing up there!"

"Yes, father!"

Carefully, Bruce began to place his treasures back into their hiding place under the loose board.

Poor Mr. Simpson. Father had bullied him, too. Like he bullied everyone. Father had driven everyone away, and had made Mr. Simpson lonely, too.

That was why Bruce had slipped into Mr. Simpson's house that morning and left a treasure for him, carefully wrapped in a napkin.

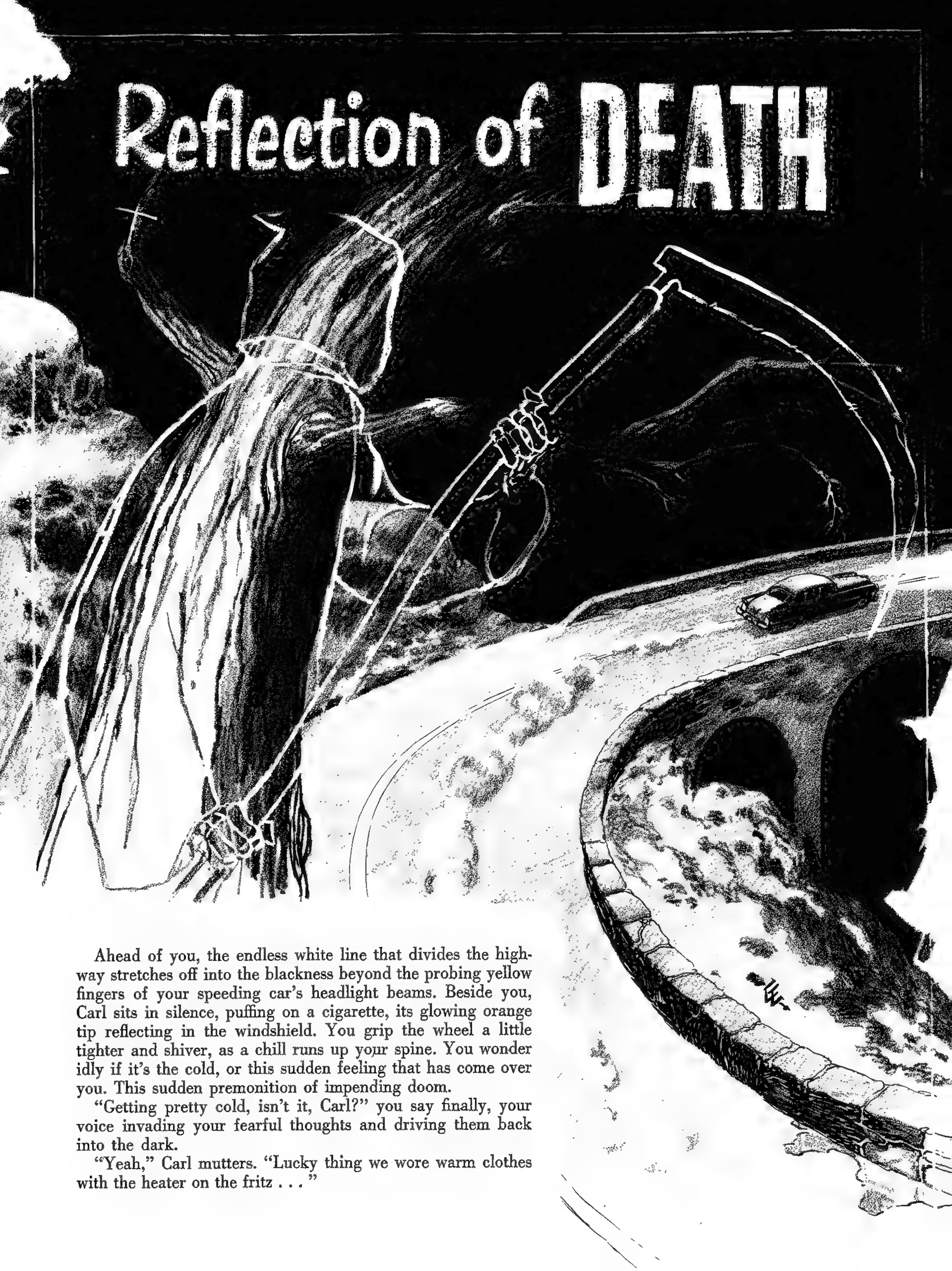
So that Mr. Simpson would not be lonely anymore.

Bruce was still holding the last of his treasures when his father came into the attic and stopped to stare with the blood draining.from his face.

There were four of them in the cavity beneath the loose board. And one in Bruce's hands. Five dead, perpetually smiling heads. Bruce's friends. His real, honest to truly friends who would never leave him, no matter how much his father insisted that they weren't good enough to play with him.

THE END

Reflection of DEATH



Ahead of you, the endless white line that divides the highway stretches off into the blackness beyond the probing yellow fingers of your speeding car's headlight beams. Beside you, Carl sits in silence, puffing on a cigarette, its glowing orange tip reflecting in the windshield. You grip the wheel a little tighter and shiver, as a chill runs up your spine. You wonder idly if it's the cold, or this sudden feeling that has come over you. This sudden premonition of impending doom.

"Getting pretty cold, isn't it, Carl?" you say finally, your voice invading your fearful thoughts and driving them back into the dark.

"Yeah," Carl mutters. "Lucky thing we wore warm clothes with the heater on the fritz . . . "

You and Carl have been riding since daybreak. In another hour, you'll be home. You're tired now. The strain of driving throughout the long day and into the night is beginning to have its effect. Your eyelids are heavy. They keep closing. You shiver again and take your foot off the accelerator.

"You'd better take over for this last stretch, Carl," you say, applying the brakes. "I'd hate to fall asleep at the wheel."

"Sure, Mel," Carl smiles.

You draw your overcoat up around your neck, pull your hat down, reach into your pocket for your gloves, and slip them on. The feeling is back again now, gnawing at you, chilling you in spite of your protective clothing.

You pull off the road, and stop the car. Carl gets out, and an icy blast lashes at your face. You slide across the seat as Carl moves around the car and slips in behind the wheel.

"Why don't you take a little snooze, Mel?" Carl says as he guides the car back out onto the highway. "I'll wake you up when we get to town."

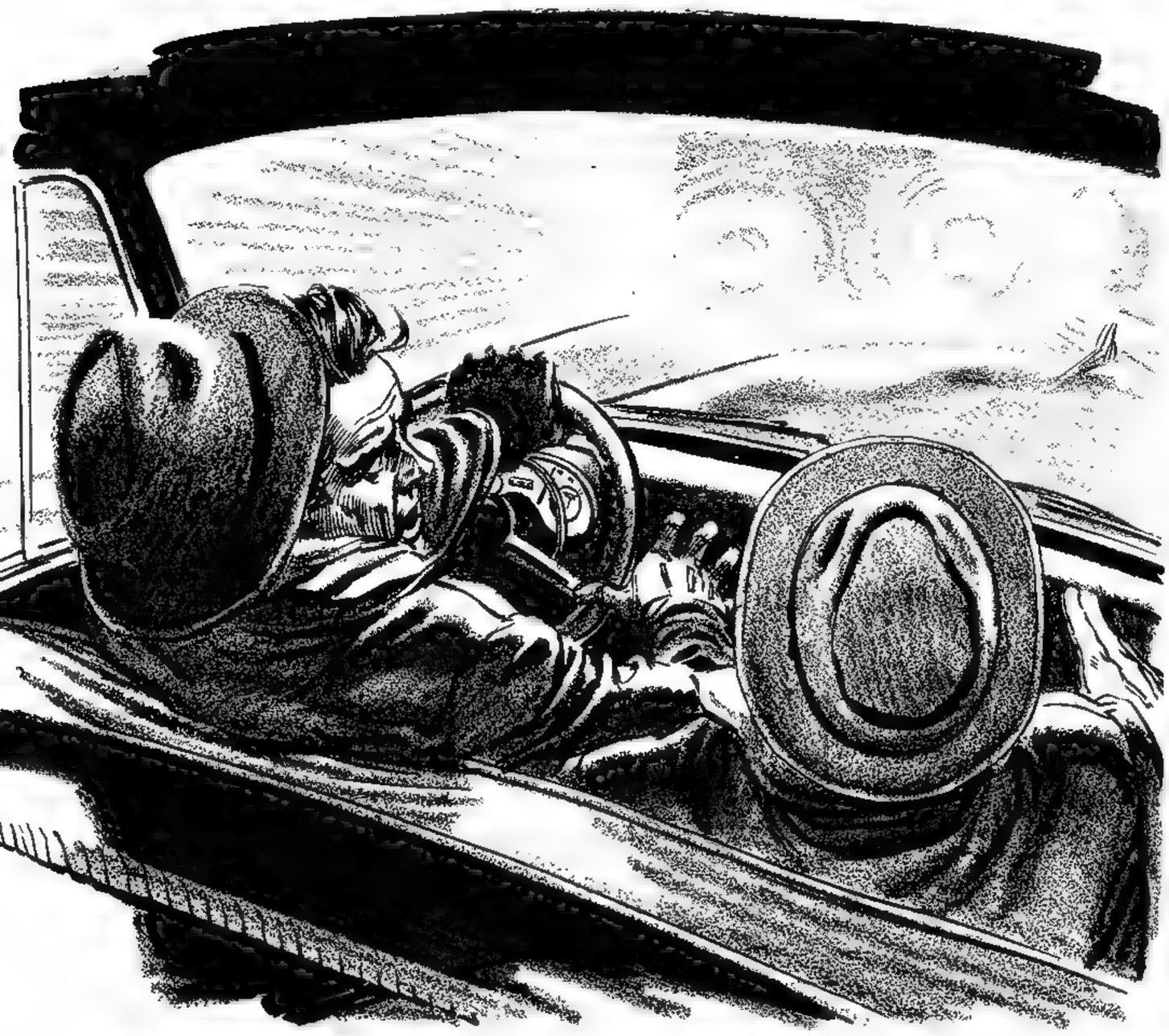
"Maybe I will, Carl," you answer. "I'll see . . . "

You stare out through the windshield. The road comes out of the darkness ahead of you and slides beneath the car . . . faster and faster . . . unending. Carl begins to whistle an off-key tune. The motor purrs. The tires hum. The road comes on. On . . . and on . . . and on . . .

Your head begins to nod. Carl's whistling continues. Flat. Unmelodic. Suddenly he gasps. You look up.

A pair of headlights . . . bright . . . blinding . . . hurtles at you from out of the blackness. You try to scream, but it chokes in your throat, a rattling cough.

"Look out, Mel," Carl shouts. "We're going to hit . . . "



You shut your eyes and hear the shrieking of brakes . . . the sudden thundering splintering crash of tons of metal and glass.

You feel yourself fly forward. There is a blasting light . . . a sudden shooting pain . . . a rush of cold air . . . and then the velvet-black night closes in. All is silent, save for a distant, far-away whimpering.

The blackness is empty . . . bottomless . . . eternal. You float in it . . . twisting . . . falling . . . then rising again. The pain is gone. The cold is gone. Everything is gone. Only the darkness remains. The infinite velvet blackness. Empty. Bottomless. Eternal.

You open your eyes. Tiny pinpoints of light puncture the blackness before you. A leaf flutters lazily, dry and brown, gliding at you. Beyond, skeleton fingers clinging to more brown leaves wave before you. And then you realize that you are on your back, gazing up at the winter-bared trees and the cold star-speckled night sky.

You raise your head slowly and look about. You are lying at the edge of a road. You try to remember. And then it comes back to you. The memory of those blinding headlights. The screaming shattering crash. A collision. You've been in an awful collision and you've been thrown clear. But the wreck! The aftermath! The mass of twisted steel and splintered glass! Where is it?

You turn as a distant hum grows louder. A car is coming. You can see the headlights, like far-away cat's eyes in the night, growing larger. You stand there, in the center of the highway lane, as the car bears down upon you. You raise your gloved hand. Its wailing brakes bring the car to a screeching stop. You can hear the driver's angry shout:

"Crazy damn fool! Do you want to get yourself killed?"

You struggle to your feet. Your clothes are torn and dirty. And there's an odor . . . a sickening smell that you can't place. You stumble out to the road . . . look up and down. You look for the wreck.

But there's no sign of it. No smashed glass. No impact-distorted metal. Nothing! Just the road. The clean, white concrete road, reaching into the moonlit night.

You step to the window, close to him. You start to ask him if he'll be good enough to drive you to town . . . that there has been a wreck and . . .

But then you see the sudden wild look in his eyes. A look of stark terror. You back off a little, confused, as he stares at you and shrieks . . . and shrieks . . .

You watch as the car meshes gears and careens away. You listen as his screaming fades into the night. You do not understand. Then you laugh to yourself. Of course! You must have been *cut* in the accident! Perhaps the sight of blood startled him. You shrug and start down the road. Toward town. Toward home.

And then you see the fire. There's someone under the conduit bridge, cooking. You can smell the savory odor over the sickening stench that seems to surround you. You move toward him. Down the road embankment. Perhaps he heard the crash. Perhaps he saw the accident. As you approach, you see that it is a hobo . . . a tramp huddled by the fire. He stirs something in a can hung over the flames. He looks up as you approach.

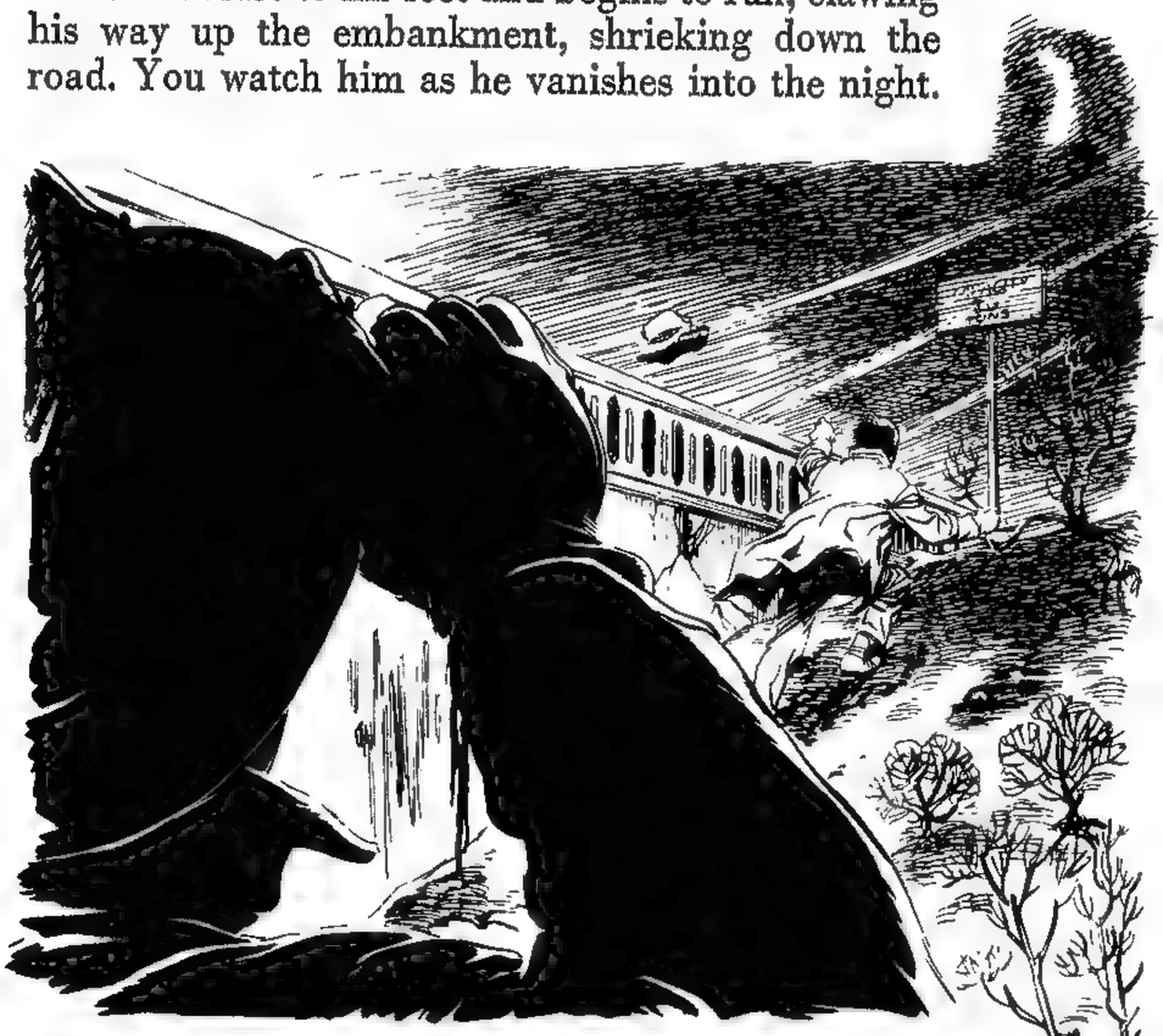
"Welcome, stranger," he smiles. "If you're hungry, set yourself down. The stew's just about done . . . "

You move into the firelight. The tramp looks into the can and sniffs, stirring its contents.

"There's nothing like a hot can of stew on a cold night like . . . " He turns toward you, and suddenly the blood drains from his unshaven face. He cringes back against the stone wall.

"Oh, Lord," he gasps. "No. No! Keep away . . . "

He stumbles to his feet and begins to run, clawing his way up the embankment, shrieking down the road. You watch him as he vanishes into the night.



What's happened to you? Why do people cringe at the sight of you . . . shriek and drive away . . . run screaming into the night? What do you look like? What has the accident done to you?

You look down . . . at the crumpled sheets of newspaper the tramp had been sitting on. You read the date, and you do not understand. "*February 26, 1956!*" Impossible! It cannot be! That's almost two months from now! Today . . . today is January 1st! The morning of the 2nd, at the most!

You and Carl had been returning from Chicago . . . from a New Year's party. A wild New Year's party. You'd been driving all day. New Year's day. Now, it is New Year's night. Or the next morning. No more. It has to be! How long could you have been unconscious? Almost two months? That's impossible! Or is it?

You climb the embankment and continue on toward town. And then you see another car coming. And this time, as you step into its headlight glare and signal for it to stop, you're determined. You must get help. You must!

The car whines to a stop. There's a woman at the wheel. She's frightened. Well, what woman wouldn't be? A lonely highway, late at night. A strange man . . . stepping out in front of her car . . . forcing her to stop or hit him. Of course she's frightened. She stares wide-eyed into the darkness, trying to see you.

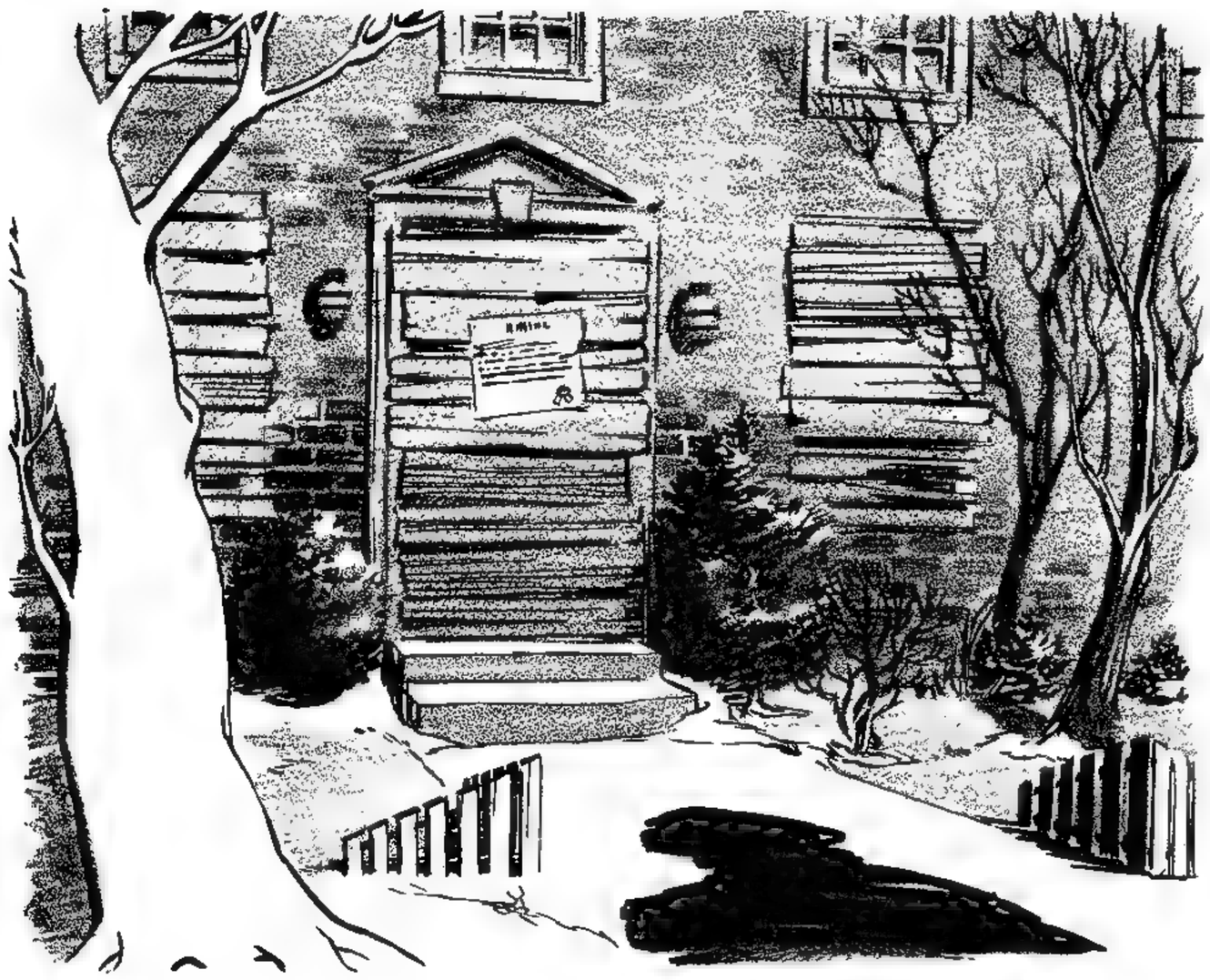
"W-what is it?" she stammers. "W-what do you want?"

You step forward. You are about to tell her not to be afraid . . . that there's been an accident . . . that you mean no harm. But there isn't the time. She takes one look at you . . . her eyes roll . . . she utters a gurgling groan . . . and then she faints.

You open the car door . . .

You slide in beside her and drive the car to the outskirts of town. You leave it there, on a side-street, the woman unconscious on the front seat. Then, you make your way home.

When you reach your house, you stop, dumbfounded. The lawn is litter-strewn and overgrown. Old newspapers whisper across the walk. The doors and windows are boarded up. The house stands silent and empty and deserted, like a tomb.



A lone figure approaches. You run to him. Is it possible? Have you really been unconscious for nearly two months?

"What day is this?" you cry as you near him. "What's today's date? I must know . . . "

And then you see his face . . .

There is a sign tacked to the boarded-up door. You move closer . . . read it: *"No Trespassing,"* the bold black letters scream at you, *"by order of the sheriff. This property has been foreclosed by the People's Bank and Trust Co., January 15, 1956, to be sold at auction on . . . "*

You turn away as distant footsteps echo up the deserted street. Someone is coming.

He runs from you, wildly, shouting for help, stumbling, falling, getting up, running again. And you run after him. You only want to ask him a question. Why does he run? Why does everybody run from you? What is there about you that makes people scream and faint at the sight of you?

Carl's house! You're standing in front of Carl's house, and the screaming stranger is gone!

Carl will help you! Carl, who was with you when the accident occurred! He'll know! He'll be able to tell you what happened!

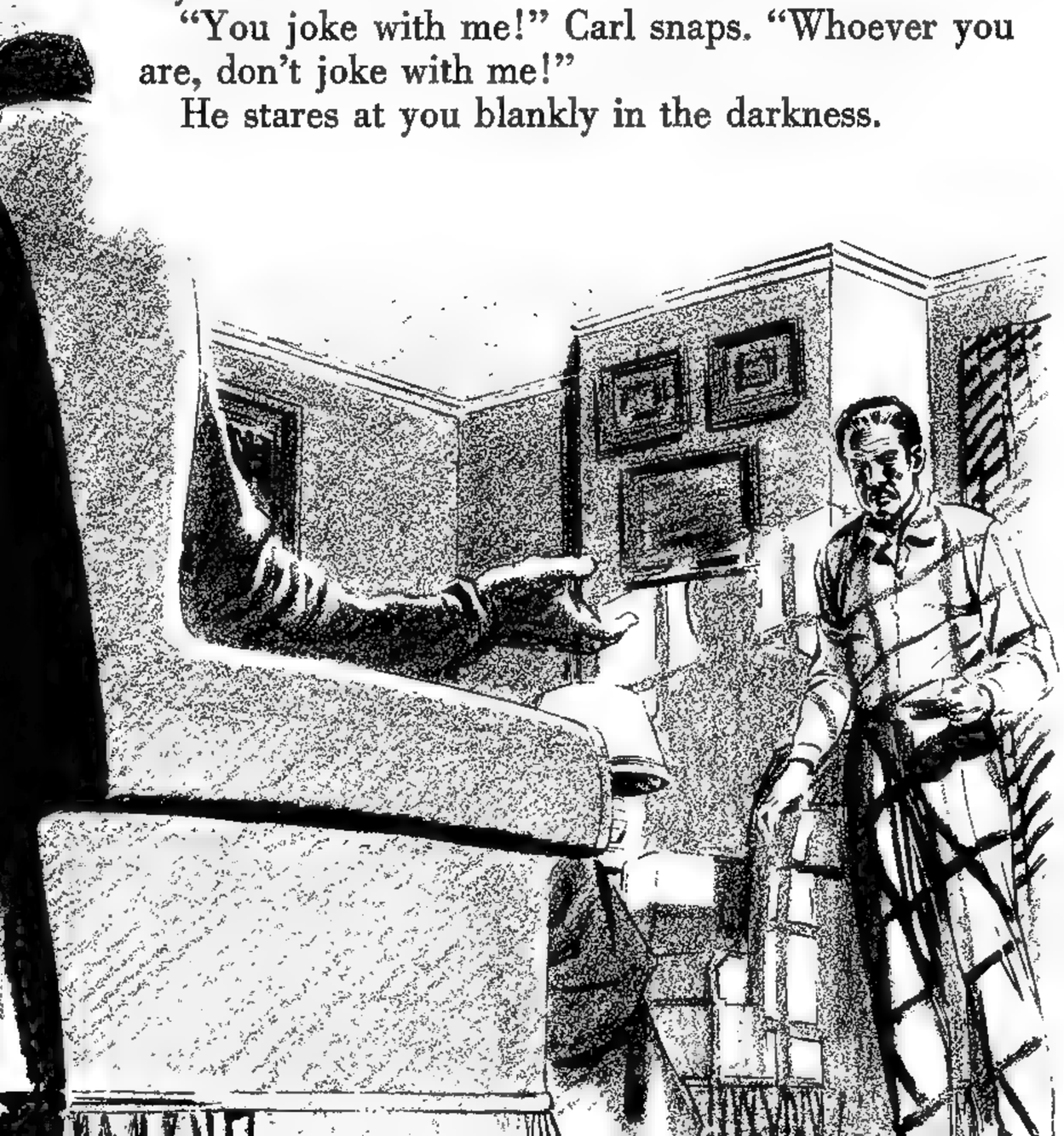
You climb the steps and ring the doorbell . . . again and again.

You push past him into the darkened house. You tell him the whole story. You blurt it out. Everything. The crash . . . how you came to . . . how people screamed and ran from you when they saw you.

"All except you, Carl," you whisper. "You did not scream! You did not run from me! You, Carl! My friend . . . "

"You joke with me!" Carl snaps. "Whoever you are, don't joke with me!"

He stares at you blankly in the darkness.



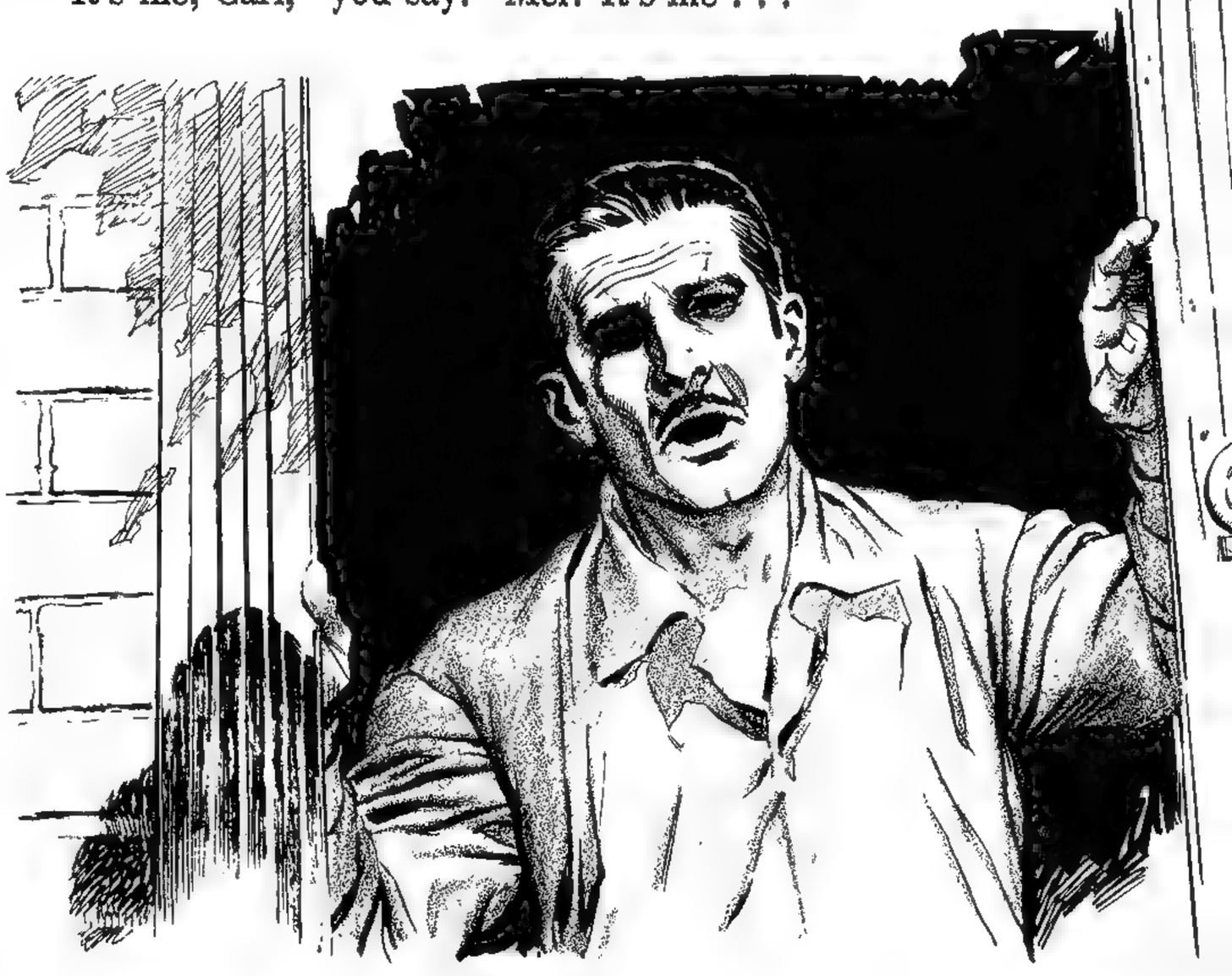
Heavy footsteps approach from within. The door opens. Carl stares out at you. You wait for him to scream . . . wait for that sudden look of horror . . . wait for him to run from you.

But nothing happens. He only stands there, staring at you.

"Carl," you cry. "Let me come in. You've got to help me. I don't know what's happened to me. Please . . . "

"Who . . . who are you?" Carl demands.

"It's me, Carl," you say. "Mel! It's me . . . "



"Don't you know me, Carl?" you shout. "Don't you recognize your old friend Mel?"

Carl shakes his head and reaches for the light switch. "Don't *you* know that Mel and I were in an accident two months ago?" he hisses. "Don't you know that I couldn't recognize *anybody?*"

He snaps on the light and you see his face . . . his eyes!

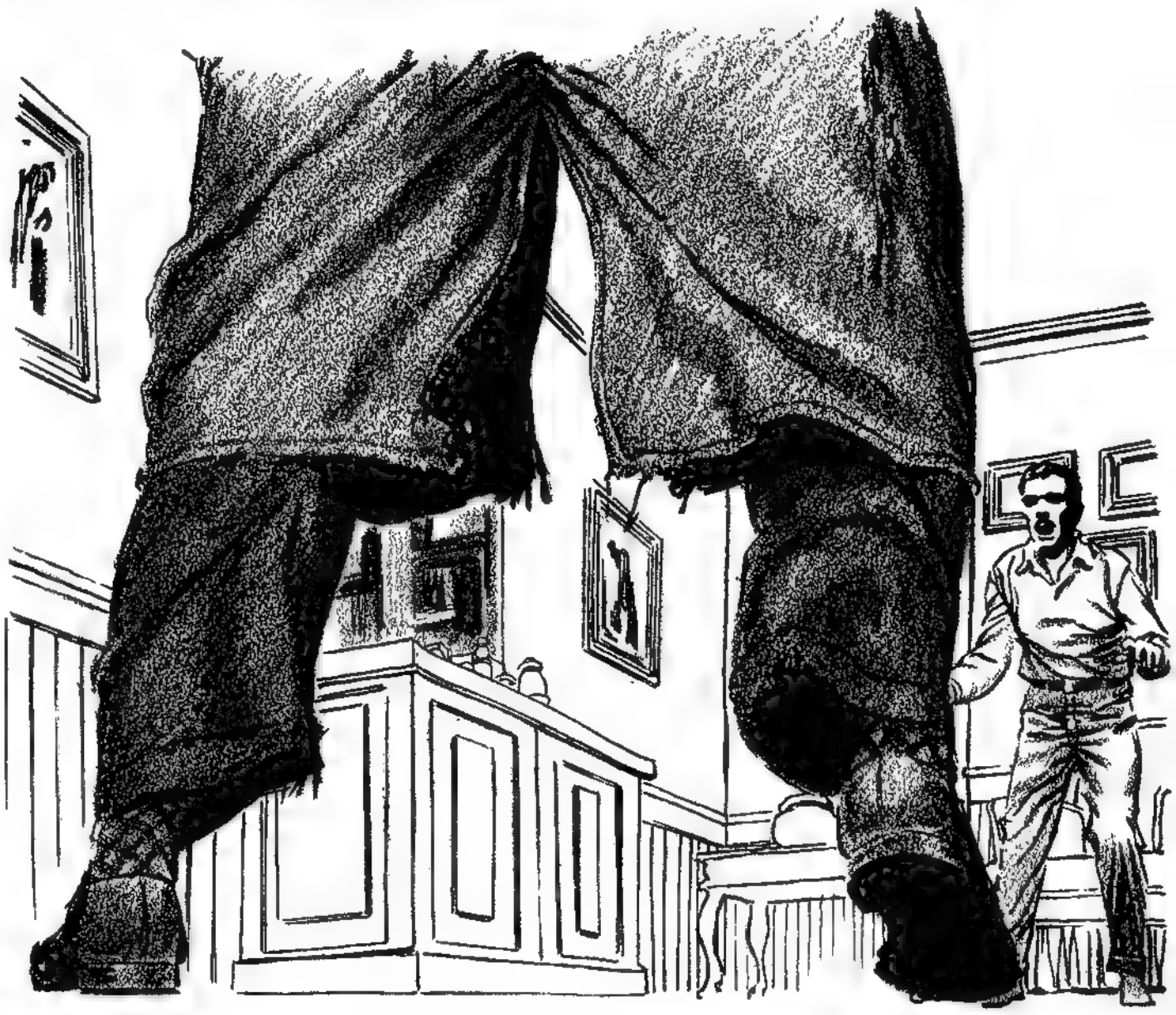
"Don't you know that I lost my sight in that accident? That I'm totally blind?"

"And don't you know that Mel *died* in that accident?" Carl goes on. "That he was *horribly mangled!* So how can *you* be Mel, when *Mel's dead?* That's why I say, don't joke with me . . . "

You reel in disbelief at Carl's words. You shake your head and gasp.

"No, Carl! I *am* Mel! I am! I *can't* be dead! I . . . I . . . "

You look around you wildly. You see the mirror. You stagger towards it . . . and you look in.



And then you scream. You open your rotted, torn, decomposed mouth at the sight of your awful reflection in the mirror and you *scream* . . .

And suddenly, Carl is beside you . . . shaking you . . . shaking . . . shaking . . .

"Mel. Mel! *Mel* . . . "

Your scream of horror vanishes, the hum of a car engine comes up, and Carl's voice probes down into the darkness.

"Mel! Mel, wake up!" Carl is saying.

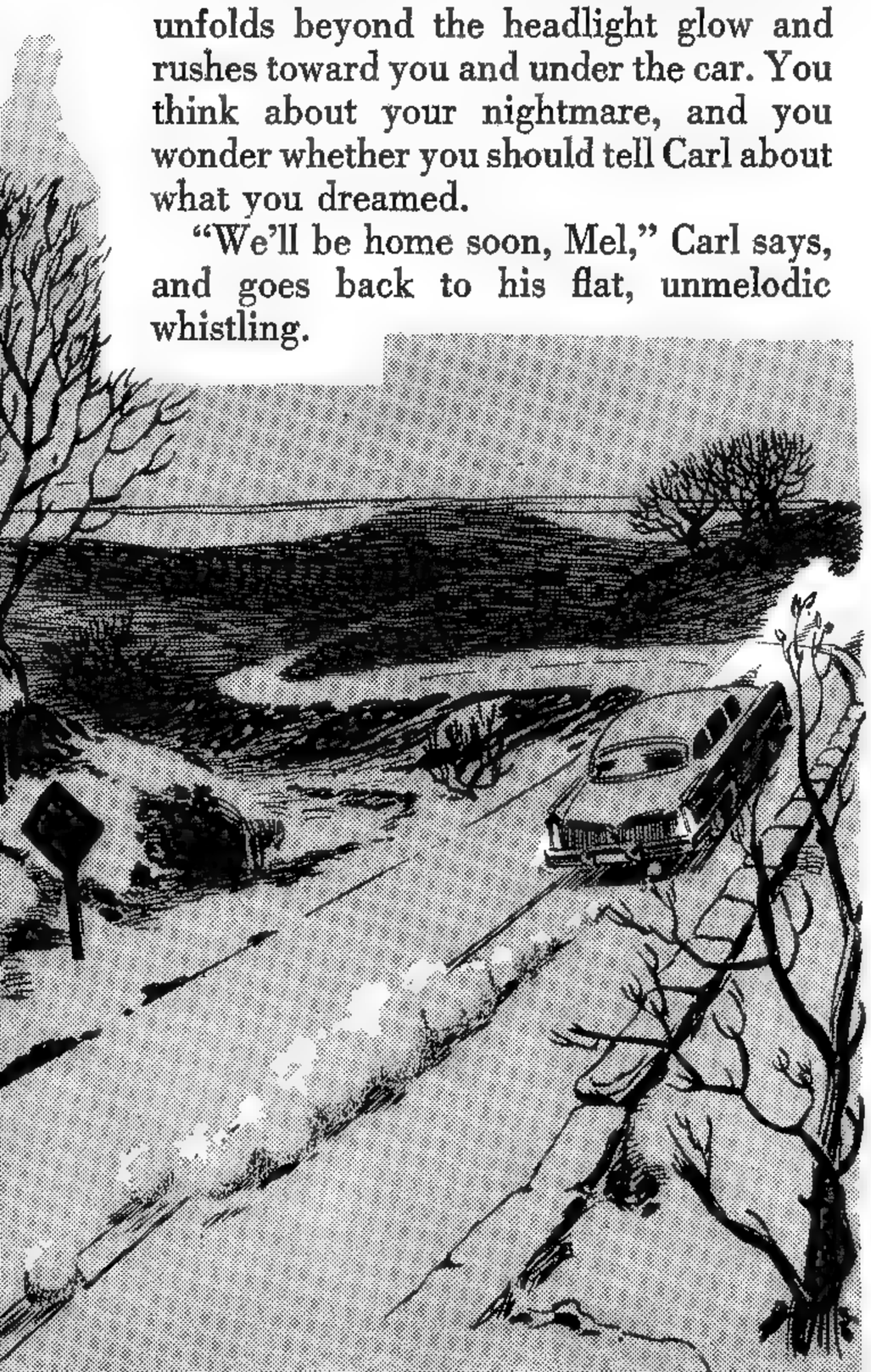
"Huh? Wha . . . ?" You open your eyes.

"You've been having a nightmare, Mel!"

You look around. You're in the car, and Carl is driving. You've been dreaming . . . dreaming the whole horrible experience!

You sit back and watch the road as it unfolds beyond the headlight glow and rushes toward you and under the car. You think about your nightmare, and you wonder whether you should tell Carl about what you dreamed.

"We'll be home soon, Mel," Carl says, and goes back to his flat, unmelodic whistling.



"Thank God," you whisper. "Thank God!"

"For what, Mel?" Carl asks.

"Thank God it was only a nightmare, Carl!" You cover your eyes with your gloved hand. "It was awful. Awful! I dreamed I was dead! Everything . . . everything was so real! So real!"

"Oh. Yeah. Sure," Carl mutters. He begins to whistle an off-key tune.

You stare out of the windshield. Far away, a pair of headlights knife through the darkness. They come down the white highway . . . bright . . . blinding . . . closer and closer.

And suddenly, icy fingers are gripping your hammering heart. Suddenly, stark terror claws at the back of your neck. Those headlights. Coming at you. Faster. Faster. Like . . .

Like in the dream!

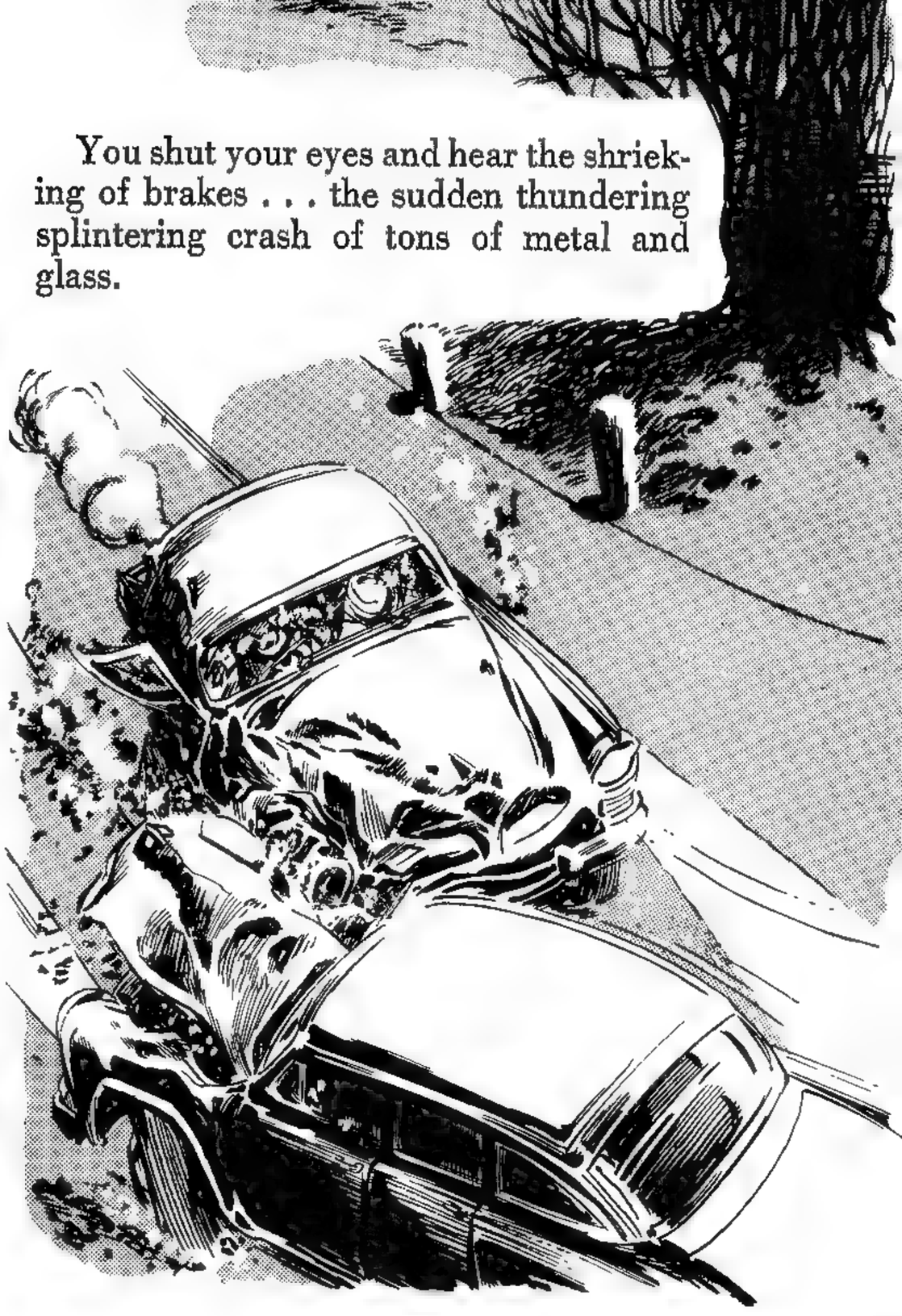
"Carl," you whisper hoarsely. "We . . . we . . . That car!"

Your scream of warning chokes in your throat, a rattling cough.

"Look out, Mel," Carl shouts. "We're going to hit!"

The dream! So much like the dream!

You shut your eyes and hear the shrieking of brakes . . . the sudden thundering splintering crash of tons of metal and glass.



You feel yourself fly forward. There is a blasting light . . . a sudden shooting pain . . . a rush of cold air . . . and then the velvet-black night closes in and you are floating in a sea of darkness . . . twisting . . . falling . . . then rising again . . .

You open your eyes. You can see the pin-point stars above you, twinkling. A leaf shudders, then tears itself away from the skeleton tree overhead and floats lazily down toward you. You know that you are on your back, lying at the side of the road. You know, because the scene is the same . . . the same as in your awful awful dream.

You raise your head and look down at your feet, at the road. And you know that you will see no smashed glass, no twisted metal. Because this *is* the dream! The dream come to reality!

The car screeches to a stop, its tires tracing black lines on the white moon-lit concrete. You wait for the driver's angry shout, just as you dreamed it. And, just as in your dream, it comes:

"Crazy damn fool! Do you want to get yourself killed?"

You struggle to your feet. Your clothes are torn and dirty, and there is a sickening odor. You know what that odor is. You *know*, now! The sound of an engine tells you of the approach of a car. You step out onto the highway . . .

The dream is *real!* You know what's about to happen! You step to the window, close to him, and you steel yourself for his reaction.

And it comes. A haunting, terrified scream.

And you know, now, that *you are dead*, and that this time, there will *be no awakening!* That this time, it *is no dream!*

THE END

No. 3 June 1956

ORIGINAL

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PICTO-FICTION MAGAZINE

Adult Tales of TERROR

Horror and Suspense ILLUSTRATED

AN ENTERTAINING EC CREATION

TERROR ILLUSTRATED

No. 3 June 1956

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Suddenly, the ground beneath their feet was no longer firm, and the children were part of a mad cascade of earth and monuments falling into an abyss. SEE PAGE 37

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Terror Illustrated, May-June, Vol. 1, No. 3. Published Bi-Monthly by I. C. Publishing Co., Inc., at 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N. Y. Application as second-class matter pending at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Subscriptions, 12 issues for $3.00 in the U. S. Elsewhere, $3.75.
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HALLOWEEN

When I think about Briarwood Orphan Asylum, I see it as it was that chilly night at the end of October when I ran sick and sobbing from its squealing doors, down its rickity steps, and out into its looming shadow, cast by a cold moon hanging low in a black fall sky.

I know I looked back once . . . just once . . . as I stumbled down its overgrown path beneath the skeleton trees still clinging to the last of their dried brown leaves. I remember seeing its yawning windows, bare of curtains . . . its paint-starved shingles, flaking off in the autumn wind that whipped around its rotting eaves . . . and the flickering light that came from beyond its flung-wide doors in the downstairs hall beyond.

And I remember the sounds. The cries and the shouts and the shrieks and the laughter of the children. Those poor poor children.

I first came to Briarwood Orphan Asylum in the summer of last year in answer to a newspaper ad Mr. Critchit had placed. Eban Critchit was the master of Briarwood. He was searching for a matron to help him in his task of caring for the orphan children, and I was sorely in need of a job. I remember his booming voice, coming from beyond his office door in answer to my shy knock:

"Yes? Yes? Who is it? Come in!"

"M-my name is Ann Dennis," I announced when I'd stepped into his presence. "I saw your ad . . ."

"Oh! Yes! Sit down, Miss Dennis," he growled.

Mr. Critchit's office was a sparsely furnished room in one wing of the run-down sprawling building that served as the Orphan Home. I sat down gingerly on the threadbare well-worn chair he'd nodded to, and looked around. Dust covered everything. The windows and the floors were filthy and needed a thorough washing badly.

"I've been terribly short of help, Miss Dennis," he said, following my glance.

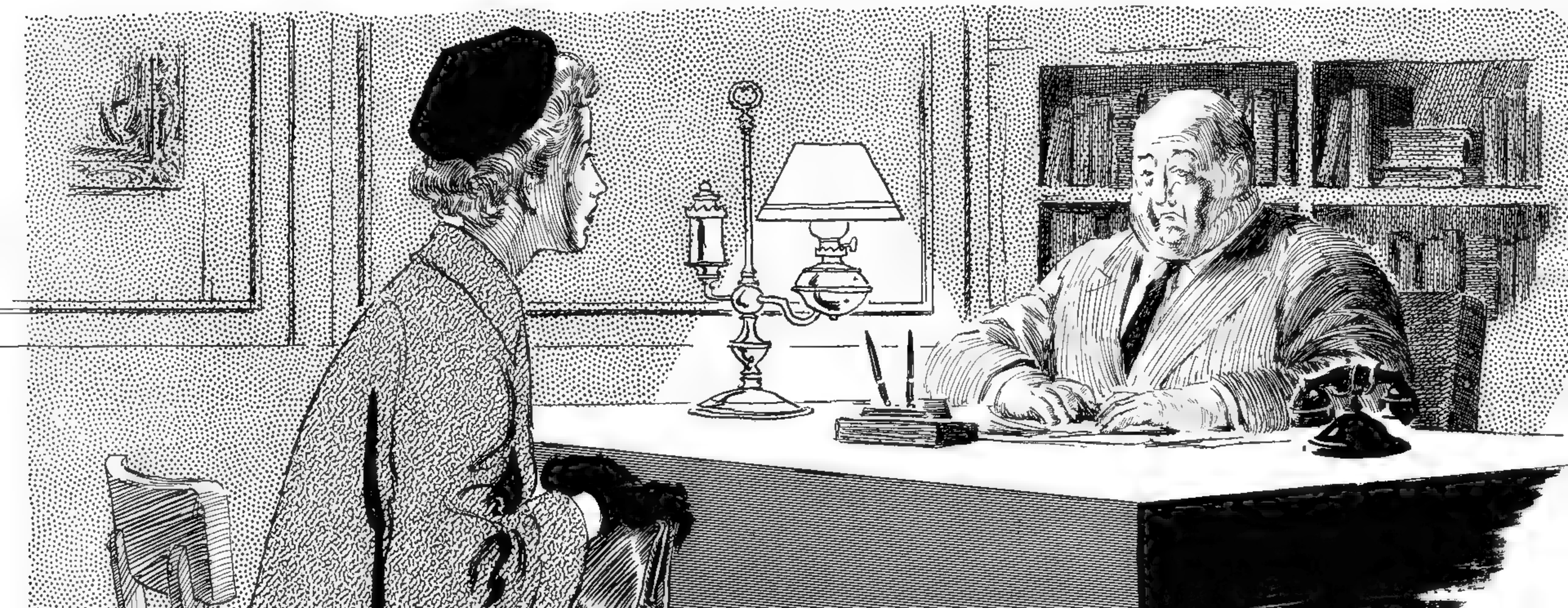
"I'm . . . sorry, Mr. Critchit," I stammered. "I didn't mean to stare."

Eban Critchit was fat and pompous. His flabby jowls sagged over his wrinkled shirt collar, and beads of perspiration covered his oval countenance.

"Your job will be a simple one, Miss Dennis," he said flatly. "Overseeing the children will be your main function."

"I see! And . . . how many children are there, Mr. Critchit?" I asked.

"Thirty-four," he answered. "They range in age from four to fourteen. Aside from seeing that they are well-behaved, and severely disciplined when bad, your prime concern will be in supplying them with an adequate education. You will receive board and lodgings and a salary of seventy-five dollars a month. I know it isn't much, but it's the most I can afford. Will you take the job?"



Although I disliked Mr. Critchit's coldness immediately, and the salary he was offering was absurd, I had no choice. I had been out of work for some time and my savings had disappeared. I was desperately in need of employment. Besides, it would mean working with children, a task I adored. I accepted the position.

"I'll take the job, Mr. Critchit," I told him.

"Good. I'll show you to your room," he said, rising from his desk.

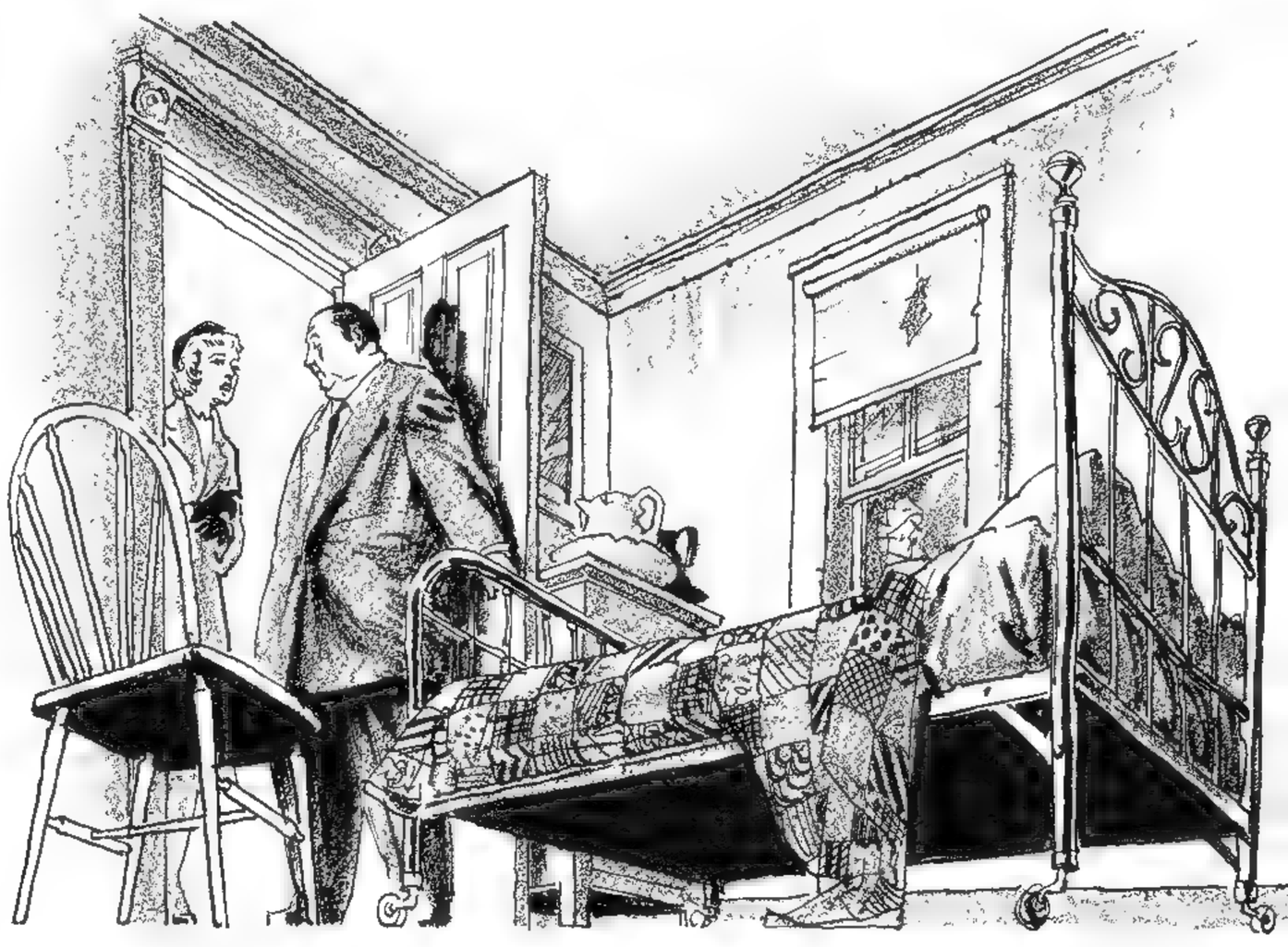
I looked around my depressing room, and I looked at Mr. Critchit, and I had a sudden desire to run from Briarwood. But then, from across the court beyond my dirty cracked window, I heard the heartbreaking sobs of a child crying. And I knew that I was needed here. Needed desperately by thirty-four lonely motherless children.

"I . . . I see! All right," I said softly. "I'll be glad to pay for them. If you'll get them for me . . ."

Mr. Critchit led me down a dark dirty hall to a door marked "Private." He turned the knob, and the hinges squealed their rusted defiance as the door swung open. Inside, a tarnished iron bed stood against one wall. A scratched and chipped wooden dresser stood opposite. Aside from these, and a plain wooden chair in a corner, there were no other furnishings.

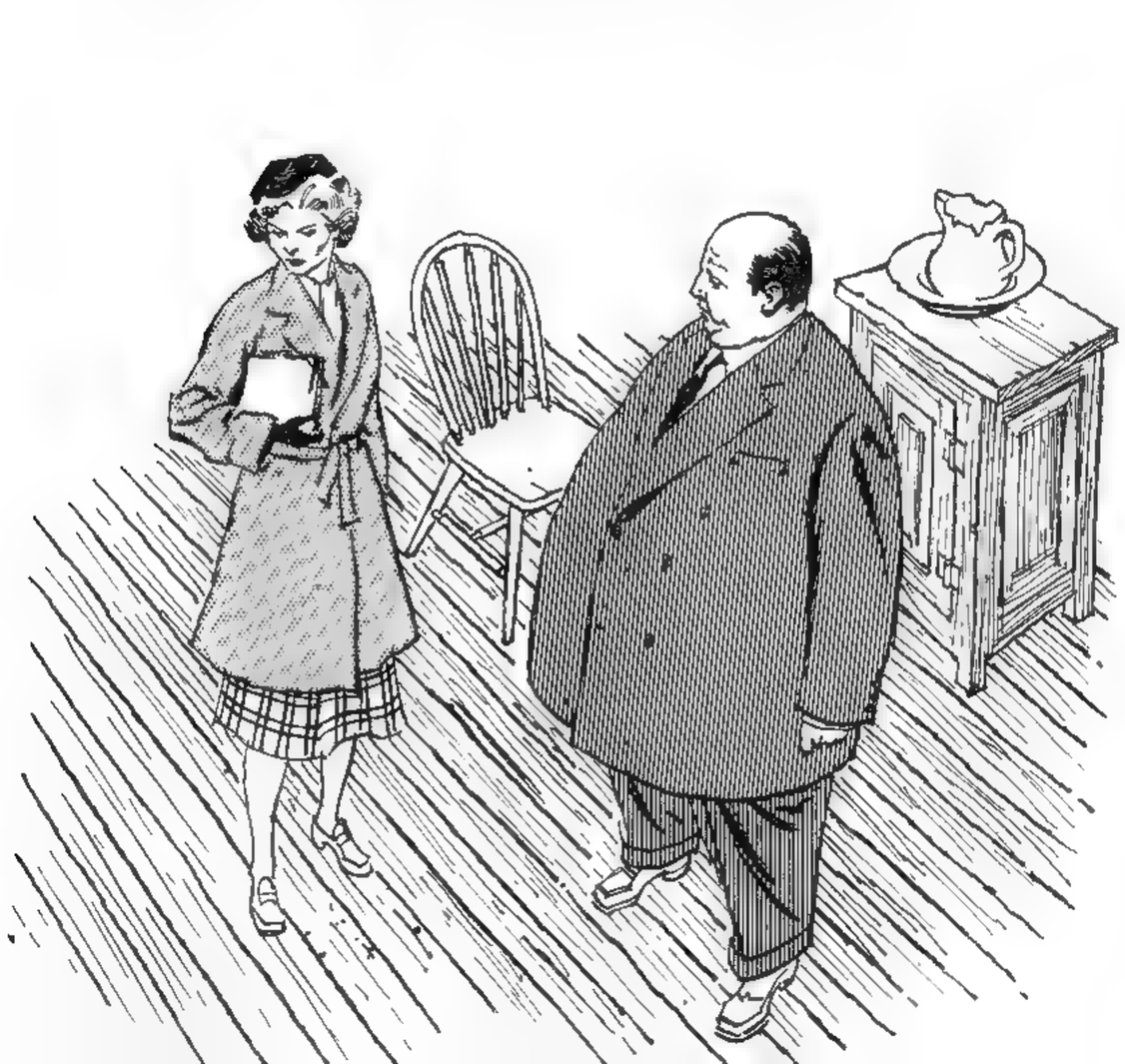
"I'll . . . need a lamp, Mr. Critchit," I said, seeing none. "I do a lot of reading at night . . ."

"Electricity costs money, Miss Dennis," he barked. "I'll bring you some candles. But you'll have to pay for them out of your salary."



Mr. Critchit turned to go. "Oh, one more thing, Miss Dennis!" He paused at the door. His face was stern, his eyes burning. "The children, and only the children will be your responsibility! The business of running Briarwood is mine! You will do well to interest yourself in only what concerns you! Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly clear, Mr. Critchit," I whispered.



Then he was gone. I started to unpack my meager belongings. Meanwhile, the child across the court continued to cry. A little later, Mr. Critchit returned with a few candles, and I lit one. Its cheery glow pushed back the gathering gloom, and I felt a little better. Until I realized that that poor child was still crying. It had been over an hour!

I stared out of the window at the darkened wing of Briarwood where the sobs seemed to be coming from. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer.

"I've got to see what's wrong," I said aloud.

I looked around. A key, hanging on a hook in the door jamb glinted in the candlelight. I removed it and inserted it in the lock. The door creaked open.

I gasped.

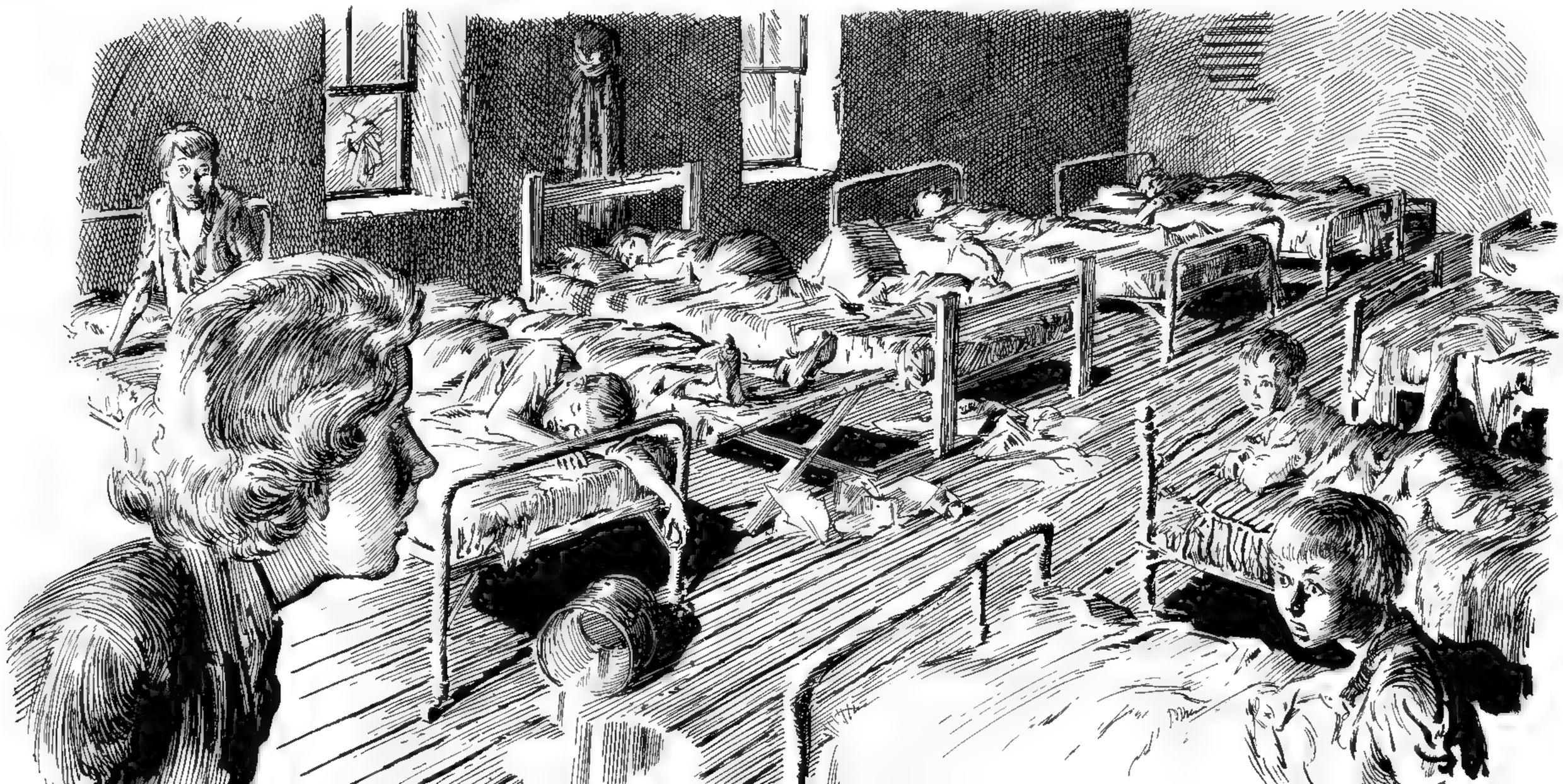
I picked up the candle and went out of my room. I made my way down dark musty corridors, pausing only long enough to allow hideous little beady-eyed grey shadows to skitter out of my path. After what seemed like an eternity to me, I came at last to a battered door marked "Dormitory."

The muffled sound of crying came from within. I turned the knob.

The door would not open. It was locked!

It was horrible! Thirty-four filthy beds lined the room, mattress to mattress. Gaunt faces peered at me with sunken frightened eyes. The child that was crying writhed on a bed at the far end of the room.

And the *stench*. The stench was *overpowering*.



I moved down the narrow litter-strewn aisle toward the sobbing child.

"Golly," whispered a tow-headed boy as I passed, "a new Matron!"

"Maybe this one won't beat us!" said a dark-eyed girl hopefully.

"She looks nice," whispered a dirty-faced lad.

"That don't mean nothin'," answered another.

"What is it, child?" I asked. "What hurts you?"

"It's her stomach, lady," said an older girl. "She cries like that after most every meal!"

"Did you eat too much, honey?" I smiled.

"That's a laugh!" sneered a grim-faced boy. " 'Eat too much!' We don't get hardly *anything* to eat!"

"Somebody's *always* gettin' sick from the food!"

"We *never* get any *milk!*"

"The meat always *smells funny!*"

I ignored their remarks in concern over the sobbing child. It was a young girl, six or seven at the most. When I placed my hand on her shoulder to comfort her, she rolled away and screamed.

"I . . . I won't hurt you, dear," I said as tenderly as I could.

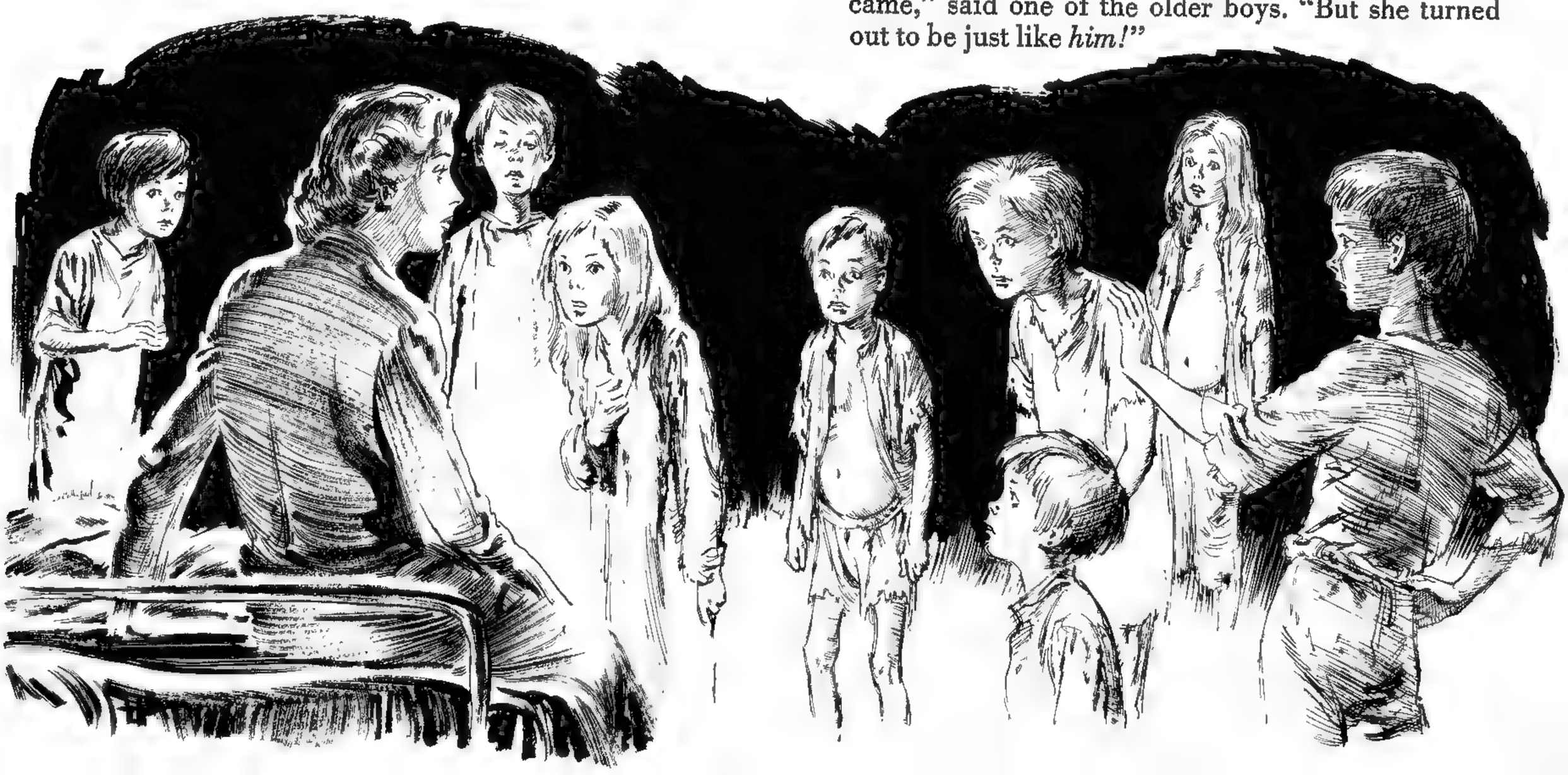
"Go away!" she cried. "Go away and leave me alone!"

I looked at the pale sallow faces around me. They were the faces of undernourished children, thin and white from want of good food. Their bellies were bloated, their arms and legs like sticks.

I comforted the sick child, talked to the others.

"My name is Miss Dennis," I told them. "I'm going to see that you're well taken care of from now on. You can rest assured."

"Aw, that's what the last lady said when she first came," said one of the older boys. "But she turned out to be just like *him!*"



That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept seeing the faces of those poor half-starved kids.

The next morning, I went to see Mr. Critchit.

"Well!" he smiled as I entered his office. "Miss Dennis! What are you doing here? Why aren't you having breakfast with the children?"

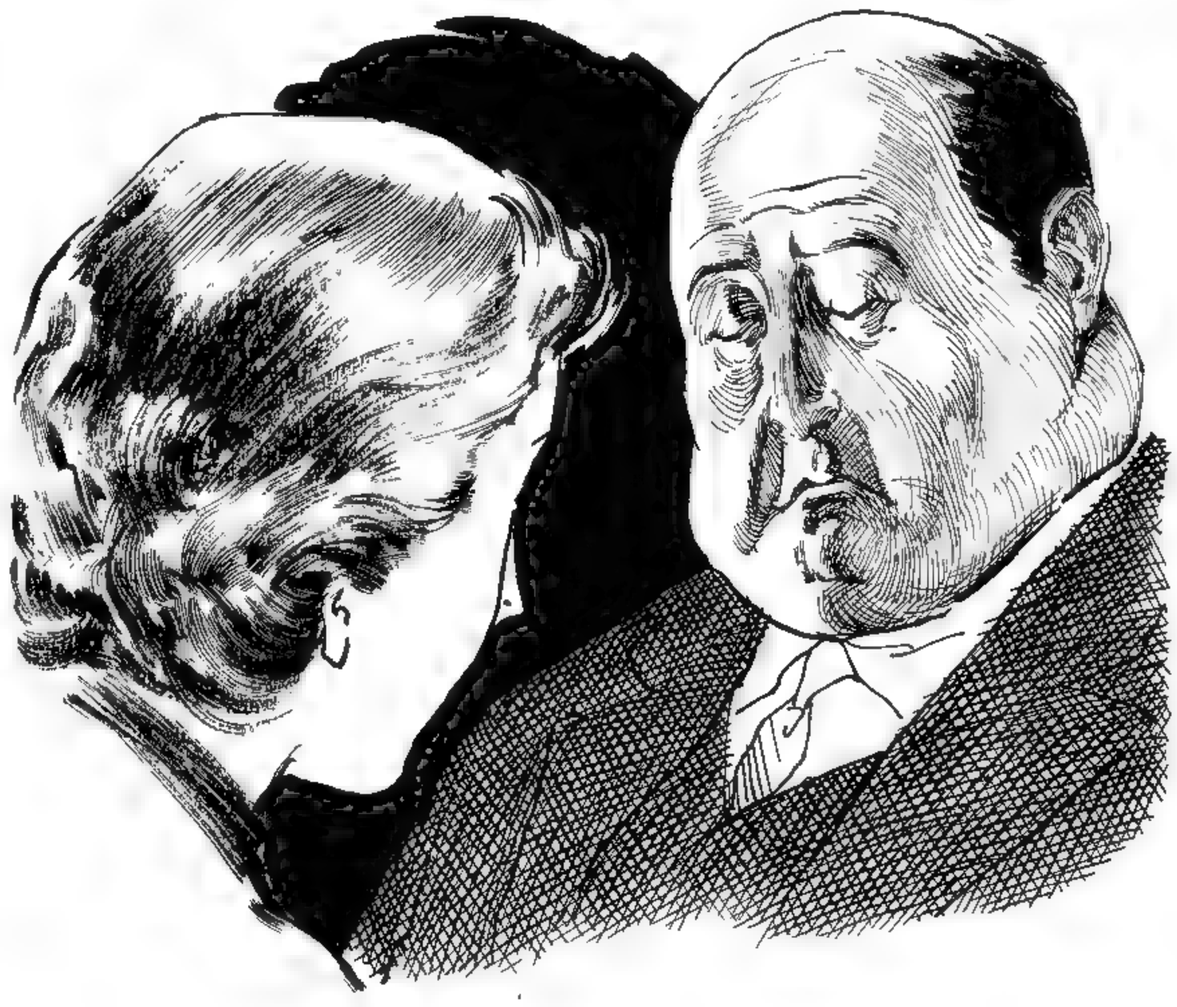
"Breakfast, you call it!" I cried. "I retched when I tasted it! Is that the best you can feed them, Mr. Critchit?"

Mr. Critchit's face flushed beet-red.

"I told you, Miss Dennis," he hissed. "Running Briarwood is my business! The children are yours!"

"When a child cries half the night from hunger, then feeding them *becomes* my business!" I snapped.

Mr. Critchit lowered his eyes. He shook his head and sighed. "I do the best I can, Miss Dennis," he said softly. "I'm allowed only so much per child. Food prices have risen. The allotments haven't."

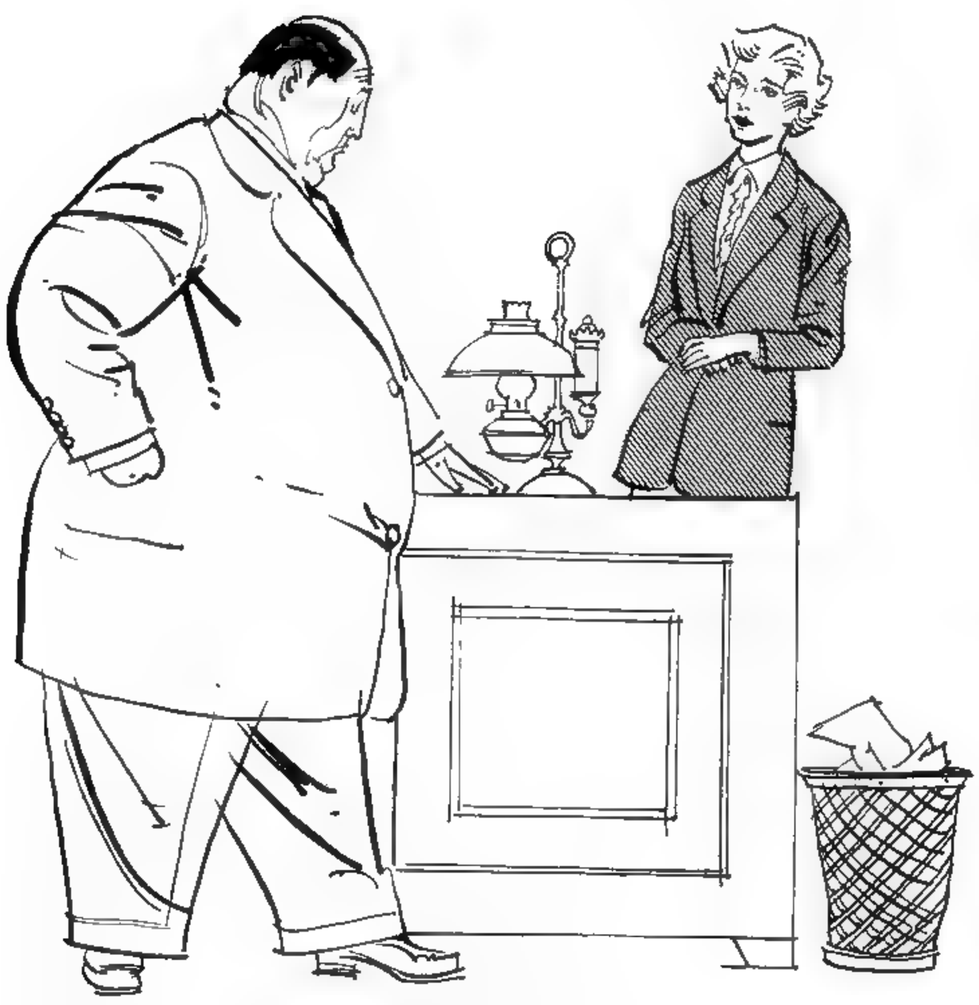


I felt suddenly sorry for poor Mr. Critchit. Now I knew why he was so cold and bitter. His was an impossible task.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "I didn't know . . ."

"I've made appeals," he went on, "but they just don't listen. There's nothing I can do."

"Perhaps with careful shopping . . ."



And so, along with my other duties, I volunteered to take over the job of buying food for the children from the meager amount Mr. Critchit doled out to me each week.

I remember that first shopping trip into town so well. I'd planned each meal so carefully. I'd bought only the barest of necessities. And yet, when the bill was totaled . . .

"That will be sixteen dollars, Ma'am," said the grocer.

"Oh, dear," I shook my head. It was too much. Mr. Critchit had only given me twelve dollars. "Wait! Here! Here you are!"

I paid the extra four dollars from my own pocket. I couldn't help it. The gaunt faces of the children plagued my mind. Naturally, I didn't tell Mr. Critchit about it.

Summer faded, and Autumn drew near. The thin little bodies of the children began to fill out from their improved diet. They attacked each meal eagerly.

Besides the food problem, another situation became intolerable for me. The children's clothes! Their garments were ill-fitting and ragged. I'd patched and re-patched them until the threads just wouldn't hold any more.

"I'm sorry, Miss Dennis," a little one would apologize between sobs, when he came to me with a torn pair of pants. "I couldn't help it. I just bent over . . . and . . . they tore . . ."

"That's all right, Tommy," I'd try to put him at ease. "I guess it's time you got a new pair, anyway."

And then, one day, Mr. Critchit call me into his office.

"Bad news, Miss Dennis," he said sadly. "The . . . the allotments have been cut!"

"Cut?" I couldn't believe it. "But . . . but that's impossible! The children have barely enough to eat now!"

"I'm aware of that, Miss Dennis. And your wise shopping and careful supervision have done wonders, too. But . . . that's the situation." He shrugged. "I'm sorry . . ."

Mr. Critchit gave me very little for clothing. Far too little to buy what was needed.

And so, on my days off, I found myself pushing doorbells in town, begging for cast-offs.

"I'm from Briarwood Orphan Asylum," I'd say. "I wonder if you might care to contribute some old clothes which your own children have outgrown?"

There were those who gave generously. I was grateful to them. And there were those who doubted.

"Scram, lady," they'd say before they slammed the door in my face. "That's an old racket!"

As far as the sanitary conditions at the home were concerned, I solved that problem happily. The children were easily recruited into an eager mop-and-bucket brigade, and we rendered Briarwood spotless.

"You've done admirably, Miss Dennis," Mr. Critchit smiled as he inspected the gleaming walls and floors. "Admirably . . ."

"Thank you, sir," I told him." But I don't deserve the credit. The children did it all."

And then October rolled around. The nights turned chilly. But Mr. Critchit supplied no heat.

I went to him and complained.

"We've got to conserve our fuel till we really need it, Miss Dennis," he told me. "I'm sorry . . ."

"I suppose you're right, Mr. Critchit," I nodded.

By September, I'd already spent my first month's salary on supplementing the children's food, clothing, and education allowances. But somehow, I didn't mind. I'd grown very fond of them. Each and every one. If they were my very own, I would not have loved them more. And my heart spilled over whenever they expressed their sentiments toward me.

"You're wonderful, Miss Dennis."

"Peachy."

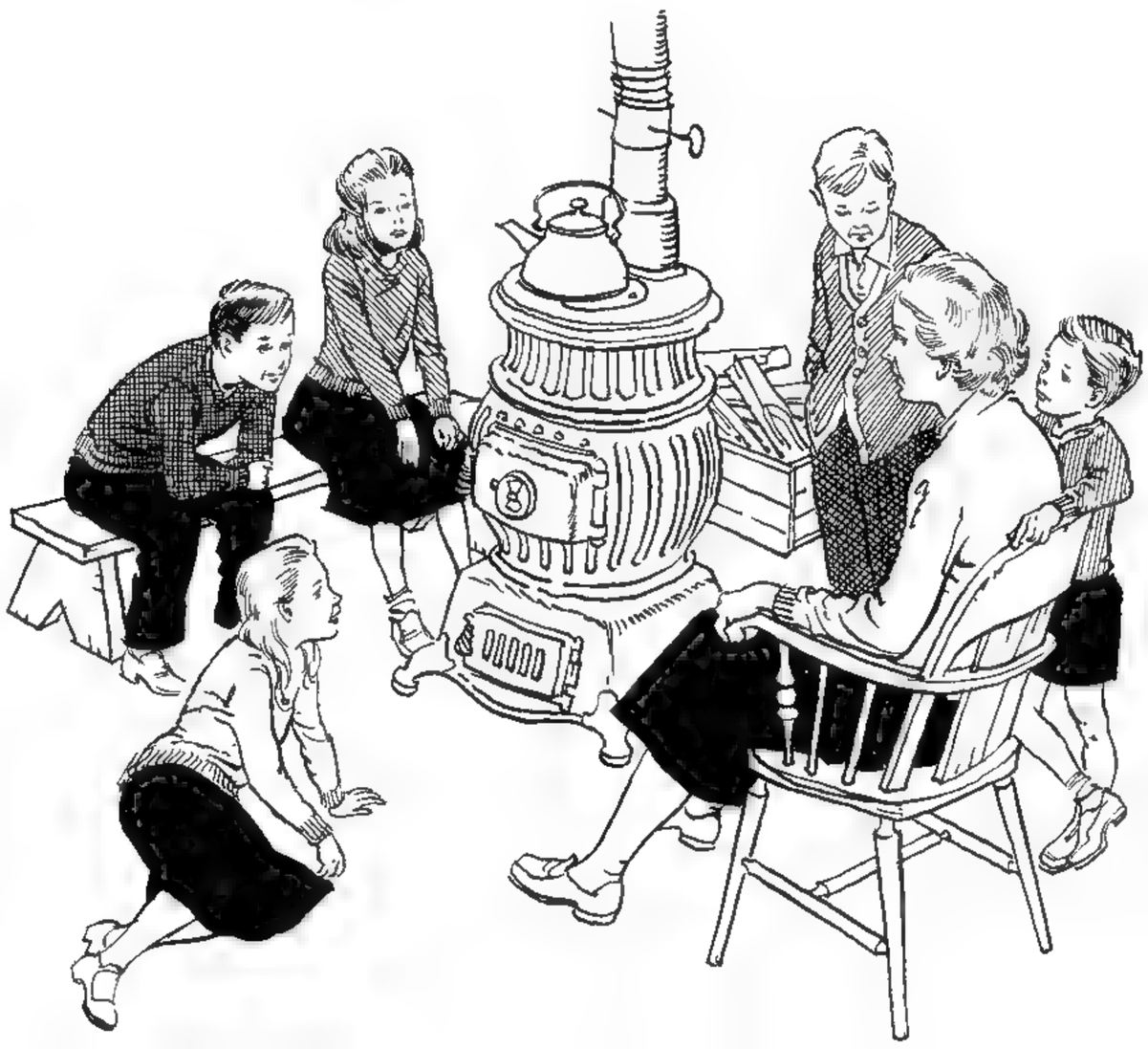
"We're so lucky to have you!" they'd say.

Toward the end of October, my previous month's salary ran out again. I knew that I'd only barely be able to get through the month on what Mr. Critchit gave me. And on top of that, the children began to drop gentle hints. Halloween was coming!

"Do you think Mr. Critchit would let us celebrate Halloween, Miss Dennis?" they asked me.

"I . . . I don't know," I shrugged.

"Just one pumpkin . . . with a candle in it? It'd be so much fun!" Their bright little eyes gleamed in anticipation.



One day, I approached Mr. Critchit about buying a pumpkin for the children for Halloween. But he just shook his head.

"No! I'm sorry, Miss Dennis," he said. "We have no money to throw away on trivialities like pumpkins for Halloween!"

"But it would make the children so happy, Mr. Critchit," I argued.

But Mr. Critchit was firm. He absolutely refused to spend a dime.

The children received the disappointing news with bitterness.

"He . . . he's rotten!"

"I hate him!"

"The old skinflint!"

"You mustn't talk like that, children," I told them. "Mr. Critchit does his best. We just can't afford a pumpkin this year."

When October thirty-first arrived, the children were silent and sullen. Outside the asylum gates, as dusk began to fall, boys and girls of the town, lucky ones who had loving parents, hooted and howled by in their hideous Halloween costumes. Their shrieks and impish threats drifted up to us.

"Halloween . . ."

"Hooooooooh . . ."

"Beware . . ."

The orphan children crowded around Briarwood's windows, pressing their noses up against the cold glass, watching . . . watching in envy.

"Look! There's a pumpkin! A real pumpkin!"

"With a candle in it!"

"Golly, I wish we . . . had . . . one . . ."

"Darn old . . . *sob* . . . Mr. Critchit . . ."

Some of them turned away with tears streaming down their pale little cheeks.

Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I was determined that the children would celebrate Halloween, no matter what. I would buy them their pumpkin! I went to Mr. Critchit's office to ask for a small advance on my next month's salary.

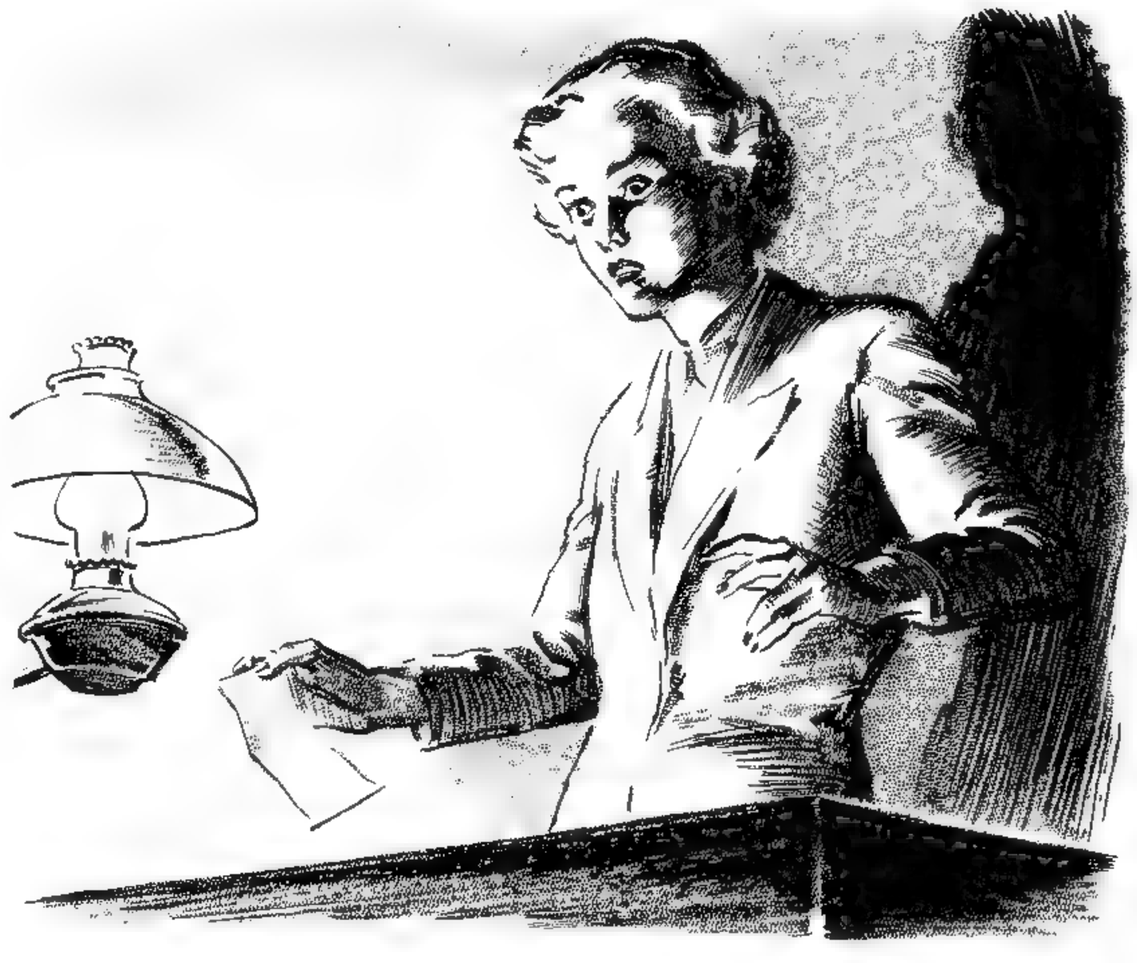
"Mr. Critchit," I addressed him coldly as I swung open the door. "I . . . I . . ."

The office was empty. Mr. Critchit wasn't in.

I sat down to wait. Outside Briarwood, distant shrieks of laughter and cries of joy echoed into the Halloween night.

And then something on Mr. Critchit's desk caught my eye. A piece of paper, pale in the yellow candlelight. I got up and looked at it.

It was a check . . . from the State . . . the November allotment for thiry-four orphans.



I almost screamed when I saw the amount. It was over *three times* as much as Mr. Critchit had been spending on the orphans!

Suddenly the picture . . . the awful picture was so very clear to me.

Mr. Critchit had been stealing from those poor children . . . skimping on the expenses...and pocketing the difference!

The door behind me slammed.

Mr. Critchit loomed in the candlelight, his fat round face purple with rage.

"What are you doing here?" he snarled.

"I know what you've been up to, Mr. Critchit!" I screamed. "I saw the November allotment check on your desk! Why, you're nothing but a dirty criminal . . . leeching on those poor defenseless orphans . . . stealing the food from their mouths . . . robbing the clothes from their backs . . ."

All of my anger and resentment spilled over as I screamed at him . . . accused him . . . cursed him.

His fat flabby lips twitched into a sneer.

"Now that you know, Miss Dennis," he whispered, "what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to report you to the authorities! That's what I'm going to do!" I shrieked.

I struggled, but his grip was like steel. Everything began to spin crazily around me as the light from the candle faded and darkness closed in.

The last thing I heard before I slipped into unconsciousness was the shrill cries of children filling the room.

"Halloween . . ."

"Hooooooooh . . ."

"Beware . . ."

He came at me . . . shuffling . . . like some monster . . . his pudgy hands reaching out . . . clawing the air . . .

"I don't think so, Miss Dennis," he hissed. "I don't think so at all . . ."

"K-keep away from me!" I gasped. "Keep away..."

He cut off my cry as his hands closed about my throat.

I came to with shrieks of delight echoing in my pounding brain. I sat up weakly. I was on the floor in Mr. Critchit's office. A searing pain encircled my throat where his fat fingers had dug in with murderous intent.

I looked around. I was alone. Mr. Critchit was gone.

I struggled to my feet, stumbled to the door, and flung it open. The children's laughter and squeals of joy wafted down the corridor from somewhere. One of them dashed by, giggling, her tiny happy face smudged with burnt cork.

"Don't . . . you . . . worry, Mary," I gasped. "You'll have your . . . pumpkin . . . yet! I'm . . . going . . . right . . ."

They turned the corner, tramping toward me. The children. With their pumpkin. Its grinning eyes flickered from the flame that danced behind them.

An eerie light crept around the corner of the corridor. I could hear the stamping of tiny feet coming toward me. Mary looked up with bright shining eyes.

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Dennis," she grinned. "We *have* our pumpkin . . . *now* . . ."

But as they neared, a cold knife of horror sliced deep into my chest.

Yes, the children had their pumpkin! Its eyes and nose had been cut away to permit the candlelight to shine through. It leered up at me with a frozen grin. It was the head of Eban Critchit!

THE END

KEEPSAKE

Ah, me. She looks so sweet. So tiny, so dainty, so helpless with her brown eyes closed forever, and her long grey hair billowing out about her head like a crown of white. So old, and yet I have loved her hopelessly for so long. And now, they have brought her to me, and she lies waxen on the table here in my workroom amid the caskets and the tubes and the needles and the syringes.

"Miss Hetty. Miss Hetty," I whisper, and then I cry softly to myself.

I know. I know what people think. That we undertakers are callous and without feeling. I know how the children look at me when I walk the streets of the town. How they draw back because I too am old now, and lean, and dressed in black because it is the badge of my profession. But the children and the town are wrong. Like Shylock, I live, I breathe. If you cut me, do not I bleed? If you hurt me, do not I feel pain?

"Miss Hetty. Miss Hetty..."

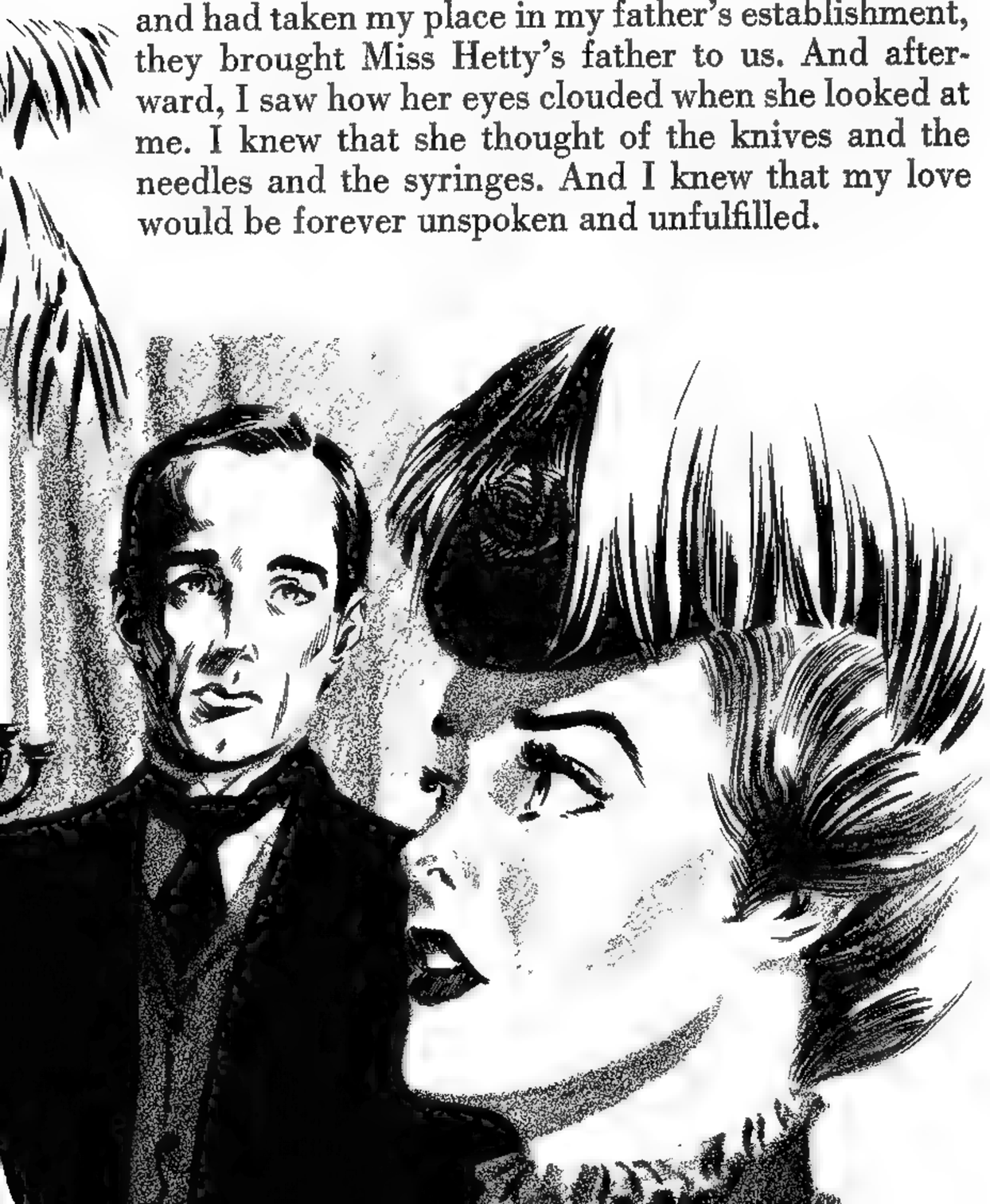
Ah, misery. Ah, memories. How they come crowding, jostling each other in their eagerness to be taken out of the dark past and fondled once again. There is so much to remember. Fifty years of remembering. Back to the days when the town was small and green and gentle, as Miss Hetty was gentle...

Always, always she was gentle. Even long ago.

When we were children playing outside the tiny schoolhouse, I skinned my knee one day. And she wept...because I was in pain.

Do you wonder that I loved her? Do you wonder that, as the years went by, my eyes turned ever and ever to that big house with the iron deer outside where Miss Hetty lived? Do you wonder that I worshipped at the shrine of her goodness from afar, aching at the delicate beauty of her, even though I knew how hopeless was my love?

And it was hopeless. Because Miss Hetty was the daughter of the town banker, and I was the son of the town undertaker. One day, when I was grown and had taken my place in my father's establishment, they brought Miss Hetty's father to us. And afterward, I saw how her eyes clouded when she looked at me. I knew that she thought of the knives and the needles and the syringes. And I knew that my love would be forever unspoken and unfulfilled.



Callous? Without feeling? Ah, me, if she'd only known. If she'd only known how much I worshipped her, all through the long lonely years.

But now, she lies before me. Quiet and still and unable to hear my sobs.

The town says she was mad. Perhaps. But if she were, *he* was responsible for that! How many years I hated him! He came one day in a surrey, behind a team of spanking mares. John Price . . .

John Price, a drummer, in a city coat, with a fine flowing, dashing moustache. Young, and bold, with the honeyed words dropping like nectar from his lying lips. And Miss Hetty saw him, and heard the words, and she was lost. She loved him as I loved her. Blindly. Without doubt or question.

And Price was clever. Miss Hetty was young, and lovely as a flower, and she owned a big house. She was wealthy.

So he married her.

Miss Hetty blossomed and flowered. Her happiness was worn proudly, like a cloak. On Sundays, when she went with him to church, she glowed.

Then, all changed. If others did not see, I saw. I saw the blight steal the bloom from Miss Hetty's cheeks. I saw the clouds behind those lovely eyes. Long before the rumors began. Long before the women of the town began to murmur to each other that all was not well between Miss Hetty and John Price, I knew.

In the end, they even said that John Price would leave Miss Hetty. There was talk of another woman. And Miss Hetty grew wan and thin. She loved John Price. Dear Heaven, how she must have loved him!

But John Price never had a chance to leave Miss Hetty. Not as he had planned. On a night when thunder roared and the very sky seemed to weep, Miss Hetty came stumbling to the door of our town doctor.

She gasped her tale, and the old doc went with her.

John Price was dead. He lay on the floor in Miss Hetty's parlor, and the dashing moustache was limp.

"Heart failure," old Doc Granger said. "Struck down in his prime, poor devil. The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away..."

Miss Hetty seemed dead in those days, too. She did not eat. She did not sleep. She did not seem to breathe. What would I not have given then to see her happy again! To see her smile!

But how could Miss Hetty smile, when they sent for me to take her John Price away?

I went. I took him. And afterward, Miss Hetty came to me, to the littered room where one day she too would lie.

"You'll...you'll do your best?" she whispered.

Miss Hetty could not bear the thought of her love rotting, falling away into a decay that only the maggots would consider fitting. Miss Hetty wanted her love to be...everlasting!

And so he was. I embalmed him. I hated him, but for her, I called upon all of my skill. I created a masterpiece, a corpse that would be as everlasting as the mummies of the ancient Egyptians. I was meticulous. And because I was, I found the hole.

Just a tiny hole, black around the edges where the powder had burned it, behind the left ear, hidden by the hair. A bullet hole.

And I knew the doctor had been wrong. John Price had not died of heart failure. Miss Hetty had...

I could not say the word, even to myself. I could not say that Miss Hetty was a murderess. So I said nothing. I told no one. John Price was laid away to rest in the massive mausoleum where Miss Hetty's family slept, in a casket of bronze. And I knew that I would never disclose her secret.

How he must have tormented her! How he must have deserved to die!

Yet, even then, Miss Hetty loved him. A dozen times I saw her after the funeral, in her widow's weeds, her lovely gentle face veiled in black...

A dozen times...and then she vanished. Vanished as though the earth had opened and swallowed her.

I was one of those who hunted for her. But the others did not hunt as I did. The others did not tremble at the thought that Miss Hetty might have found her grief too much to bear.

A week went by. Two. And I kept thinking, "Gone. Gone. As if the earth had swallowed her..."

As if the earth had swallowed her! Ah, fool that I was! Not the earth, but the tomb! The tomb where John Price lay, with the hole behind his ear carefully plugged with the wax I'd placed there! Where else would Miss Hetty have gone?

We went to the cemetery at night. We walked through the cold wet grass, past the monuments to the other dead, carrying torches. We made a procession that came at last to the mausoleum.

I went inside alone. The others were afraid. They would not go. I stood inside the massive door and my torch threw a flickering light upon Miss Hetty.

She was on the stone floor, curled up, like a babe still within its mother's womb, with her head resting against the marble dais on which the coffin of John Price had been set.

And all of us heard the voice inside, whimpering, pleading.

"She...she couldn't leave him!" one of the men hissed the words, in a whisper, as if we were intruding upon something sacred. "Not even...now..."

Her eyes stared blankly, emptily, through the tangle of undone hair which had burst loose and come cascading down around her small shoulders. There was dirt on her face and on her hands, and her cheeks were hollow and sunken, with a bright spot like a red silver dollar glowing in each. And she was trembling. Not from fear, but from the fever which burned inside her.

But she was content. She was happy. When we tried to take her away, she screamed and fought us. She would not leave. The others recoiled after a while. They feared her with the superstitious dread of those who are not intimate with death. Only I persisted. I spoke to her softly, and at last I carried her away in my arms, gently, while she clung to me and wept.

It was I who brought her home. It was I who placed her in her bed and sent her woman to her to take away her filthy garments. It was I who sent a man for the doctor.

I did all those things out of my love for her. And then, I was shunted aside. I was no longer of any use. There was nothing for the others to fear, then.

The fever raged in Miss Hetty for ten long days. For ten long days, I lived in agony, lest in her delirium she blurt out the truth. But if she did, it was not heeded. She burned, and then the fever left her. And when she was strong enough, she ordered the doctor out. She sent the woman who attended her away.

And she was alone.

It was months before any of us saw her again. And when we did, she had changed. She was still gentle, still tiny and lovely. But there was a difference. In her eyes, for the most part. They were blank and expressionless. And on her lips, Miss Hetty wore a perpetual smile. She was happy. But in a way that none of us understood. In a way not of this world.

About her, there hung a . . . how shall I describe it? . . . an odor, a bitter tenuous perfume I knew. The odor of death.

Miss Hetty walked, and smiled, and lived alone in her big house. And where she moved, the odor of death followed.

"Mad," old Doc Granger said after a while.

"Mad," the town echoed.

They might have put Miss Hetty away, but she came of a family long important in our community. She disturbed no one. So she was not disturbed. They let her be.

Oh, the Mayor went to her home, once. He spoke to her about having someone come to live with her. But Miss Hetty smiled her gentle smile and said that she was quite all right, that she had everything she needed, and would the Mayor please leave and not bother her ever again!

And from then on, there were no visitors at the big house. Miss Hetty wanted none.

Sometimes, I would steal up there and look inside through a downstairs window, into the parlor. Just to see her. Just to be certain that she was all right.

But I need not have been concerned. Miss Hetty was happy. It was as if those days and nights in the tomb had blotted out all memory of John Price forever from her mind. She never went there again, and I was glad for her. It was better that way.

Callous, they say? Unfeeling? Now, when I look down on that pale still face with its crown of long white hair, it is as if all the years are here . . . as if all the years have become this one instant, this one moment . . . as if all the pain and longing is a single sharp dagger in my heart.

All these years, and I'd had nothing. Even Miss Hetty'd had more.

Miss Hetty'd had her happiness. She'd found that much. Empty as the years must have been . . . mad as they must have been . . . she'd been content.

And I! I'd lived as she'd lived. Alone. Unloved. But my nights had not been like hers. My nights had been spent in restless, hopeless tossings and turnings. My loneliness had tortured me. There had been no madness to comfort *me*.

I breathed the odor of death which seemed to still hover about her, and she did not know me. She smiled. She spoke. But she did not know me!

Can you feel my anguish? Even *that* was lost to me!

She walked on, and I had nothing. Nothing!

Ah, the years. The long years of wanting Miss Hetty's nearness. Of yearning.

But there'd been no nearness. Not for me. Only Time, the great destroyer, had drawn ever closer. Time's acid finger etched fine lines in Miss Hetty's face, stole the gleam from that crown of hair and turned it white.

One day, Miss Hetty walked past my shop. And suddenly she was old. I went out. And I spoke to her.

I should have known then.

First the mind dies. Then the heart and the complex myriad organs which Nature has devised to give us soul, and love, and hate. Miss Hetty was already dead. But I did not know.

I did not know until they found her yesterday, lying crumpled in the street before her house, still smiling her empty, contented smile.

How the town has buzzed since then. It had been almost half a century since any one had entered Miss Hetty's house. And yesterday, they entered at last. Eagerly. Curiously.

They found a house out of the past. A place of shadows and dust and decay. For fifty years, nothing in that house had changed.

I was there, as I was that other day, long ago, at the tomb. I was there and I hated them for their nervous, irreverent jokes. For their desecration of what had been Miss Hetty's.

They poked here, and sought there. For what, I did not know. And none of them felt the things I felt. How could they? They were but the sons of the fathers I had grown up with and buried. To them, Miss Hetty had been just a curiosity.

Only I went upstairs, at first. To be alone a little. To move where Miss Hetty had moved. To feel, even a little, her presence.

And so it was I who found . . . what I found.

I went to Miss Hetty's bedroom. Dark, with old fashioned draperies drawn tightly across the windows. And I smelled again the odor of death that had clung to her through the years.

I flung the drapes aside to let in the sun. And then I turned.

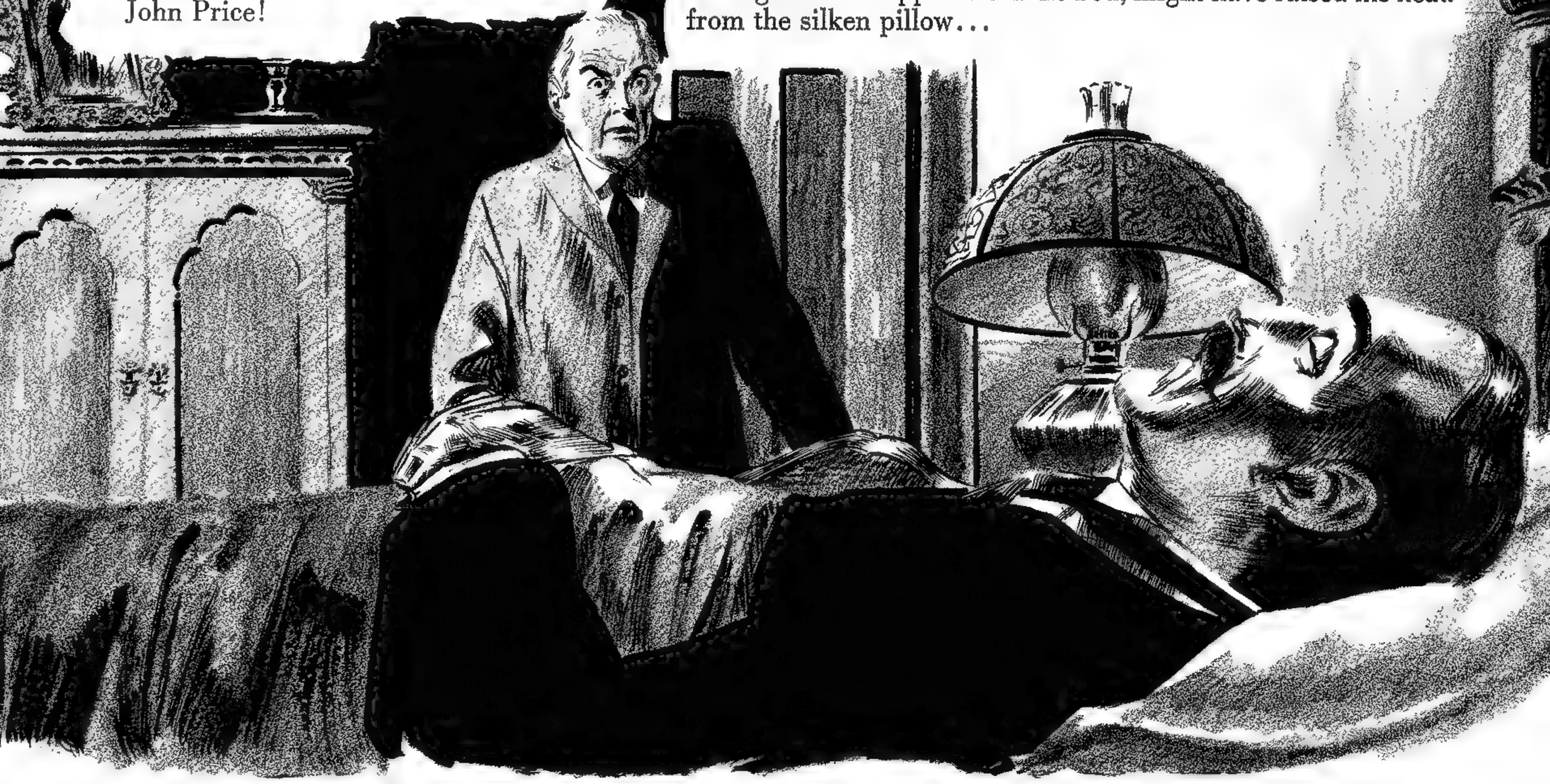
And I suddenly knew why Miss Hetty had smiled. I knew why she'd been content all these years.

How she had managed it, I will never know! No one will ever know!

But *he* was there!

John Price!

He lay in the big bed, under the covers, dressed in a black suit, his waxen hands folded on his chest, still young, still dashing. I had done my work well. There was no decay. Almost, he might have stepped from the bed, might have raised his head from the silken pillow...



But it was not at John Price's pillow that I stared. It was at the pillow beside his corpse. And then I understood.

The pillow was depressed. As if someone had slept there only the night before. And clinging to it, to the depression, I saw two long grey hairs . . .

So now I know why Miss Hetty had been content. She'd had happiness, because she'd had *something!* Miss Hetty'd had a keepsake!

And thus, she has solved my problem. Now, I too, will have something, after all!

They think that they're going to bury Miss Hetty tomorrow. They think that when they carry her coffin to the cemetery, she will be in it.

But they're wrong!

THE END

THE MOTHER

It had begun to rain, and under the lowering night sky, the ramshackle house squatted like a giant misshapen frog, ugly and cold. Part of the roof had long since fallen in, and the ruins of a brick chimney lay scattered amid the tangled weeds and bushes where there had once been a garden.

The mother shuddered and clutched all the tighter the two small hands placed so trustingly in her own. The children . . . a boy of nine and a girl of eight, with pale pinched faces . . . were frightened. She could feel their fright.

"Mama, I don't like it here," the boy whined, shivering.

"It's a place to stay, baby," the mother soothed him. "We . . . we don't have any other . . ."

In the darkness, the mother's eyes turned to her husband. Not angrily. Not even accusingly. There was no feeling of any kind left in her for this great hulking unshaven man with the reek of cheap whiskey perpetually hovering about him.

"Well?" The alcohol-thickened voice snarled a challenge. The bleary eyes focused. "Wha' did you want t' do? Sleep in the street? We got thrown out of that crummy furnished flat we paid good money for every month! Remember?"

"We wouldn't have been put out if we'd *paid* every month, Frank!" The mother was patient. Eternally, irrevocably, forever patient.

The father, however, was not. He swung at her suddenly, savagely . . .

Dirty fingers left a harsh imprint on her cheek.

The snarl trailed off. "C'mon. There's beds inside. Nobody's been near this dump for years."

The mother followed, holding tightly to the cold trembling little hands.

There was no door. Just a black, yawning cavity. Krebs struck a match. And instantly there was a running, a skittering, a scratching.

"Rats!"

They were everywhere. Tiny red eyes gleamed in dark corners. Musty grey bodies beneath glimmering cobwebs. Rattling claws on rotted wood.

"Meaning I'm a bum, eh?" A red, thick-featured face was shoved close to her own. "Meaning I used our dough for booze 'stead of payin' the rent, eh? Okay! So what! I found this place, didn't I? I'm takin' care of my family, ain't I? So don't you give me any of your lip, y'hear? Nobody gives Frank Krebs any lip! Nobody . . .

Then they were gone. Only the dust, the piles of refuse, the broken window glass remained.

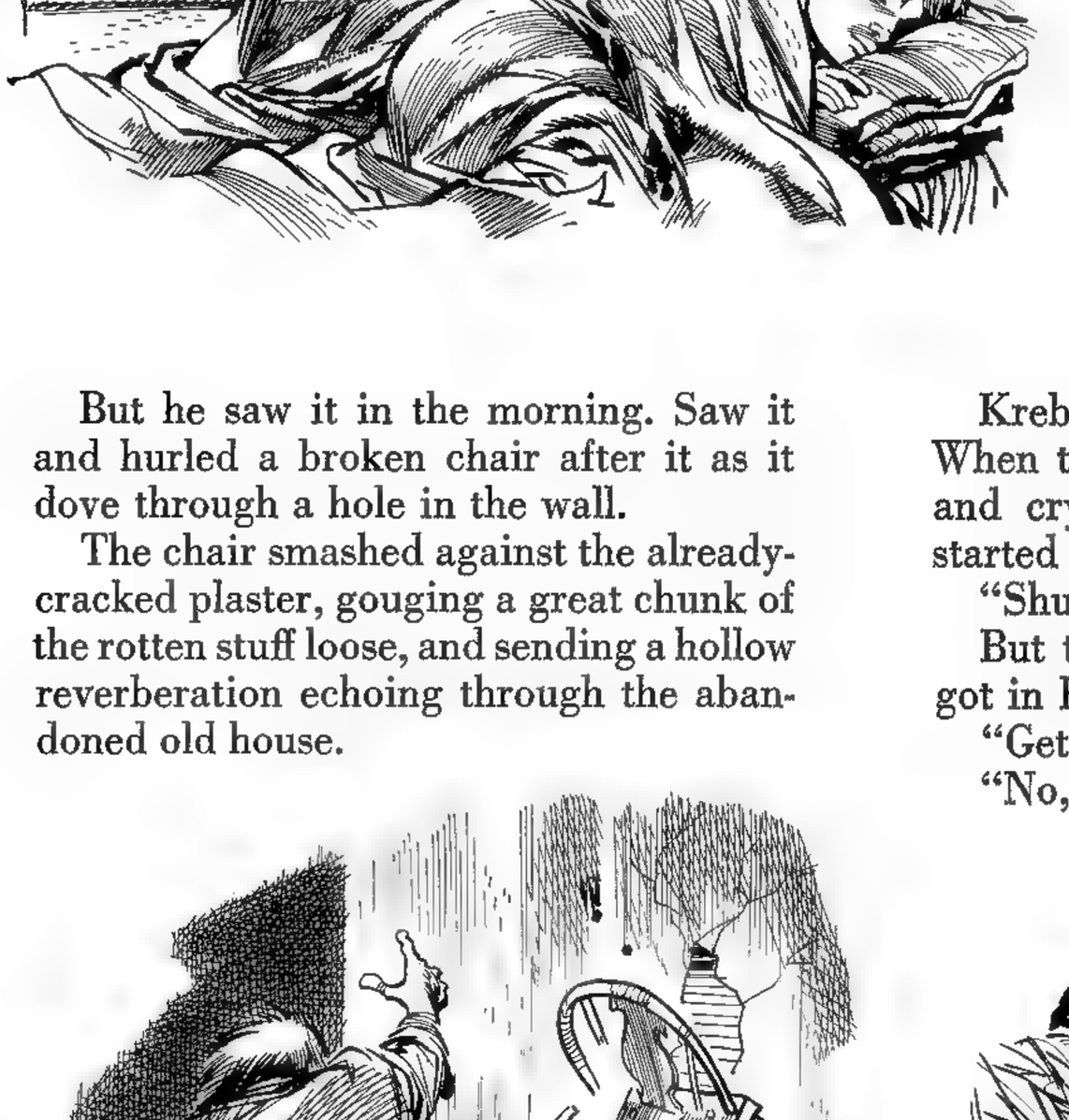
"Rats!" Krebs shuddered and dropped the broken table-leg he'd snatched up from the littered floor. "I hate rats! Always hated rats . . ." And then they were forgotten. There was a pint of raw whiskey dulling his memory, warming his insides. "Upstairs. There's a couple o' bedrooms with windows still in 'em upstairs. C'mon . . ."

"No, Frank! We can't stay here!" The mother drew back. "The children . . ."

"We'll stay!" The rasping voice was bleary in its triumph. "No rent! No nothin'! It's perfect!"

Upstairs, there were two dark rooms. In one, there was a bed. Broken, sagging, covered with a mildewed rancid blanket . . . but still, a bed. Krebs fell on it, and he was asleep almost at once.

The mother took the children into the other room. For them, there was a musty pile of moldy rags. She stayed with them until they had fallen asleep.



But he saw it in the morning. Saw it and hurled a broken chair after it as it dove through a hole in the wall.

The chair smashed against the already-cracked plaster, gouging a great chunk of the rotten stuff loose, and sending a hollow reverberation echoing through the abandoned old house.

Then she kissed them and left the old house. It was past midnight and she had eight hours of work ahead of her . . . downtown, in the office building where she was a charwoman.

Krebs did not see the huge beady-eyed rat which leaped up onto the foot of his bed, later, and sat there, staring at him.

Krebs was feeling mean, the way he always did after a drunk. When the children, awakened by the noise, ran in, frightened and crying, he heaved himself up from the filthy bed and started after them, mumbling:

"Shut up! Whining brats! Hanging onto me like . . ."

But the mother was home by then. She appeared suddenly, got in Krebs's way, stood between him and her children.

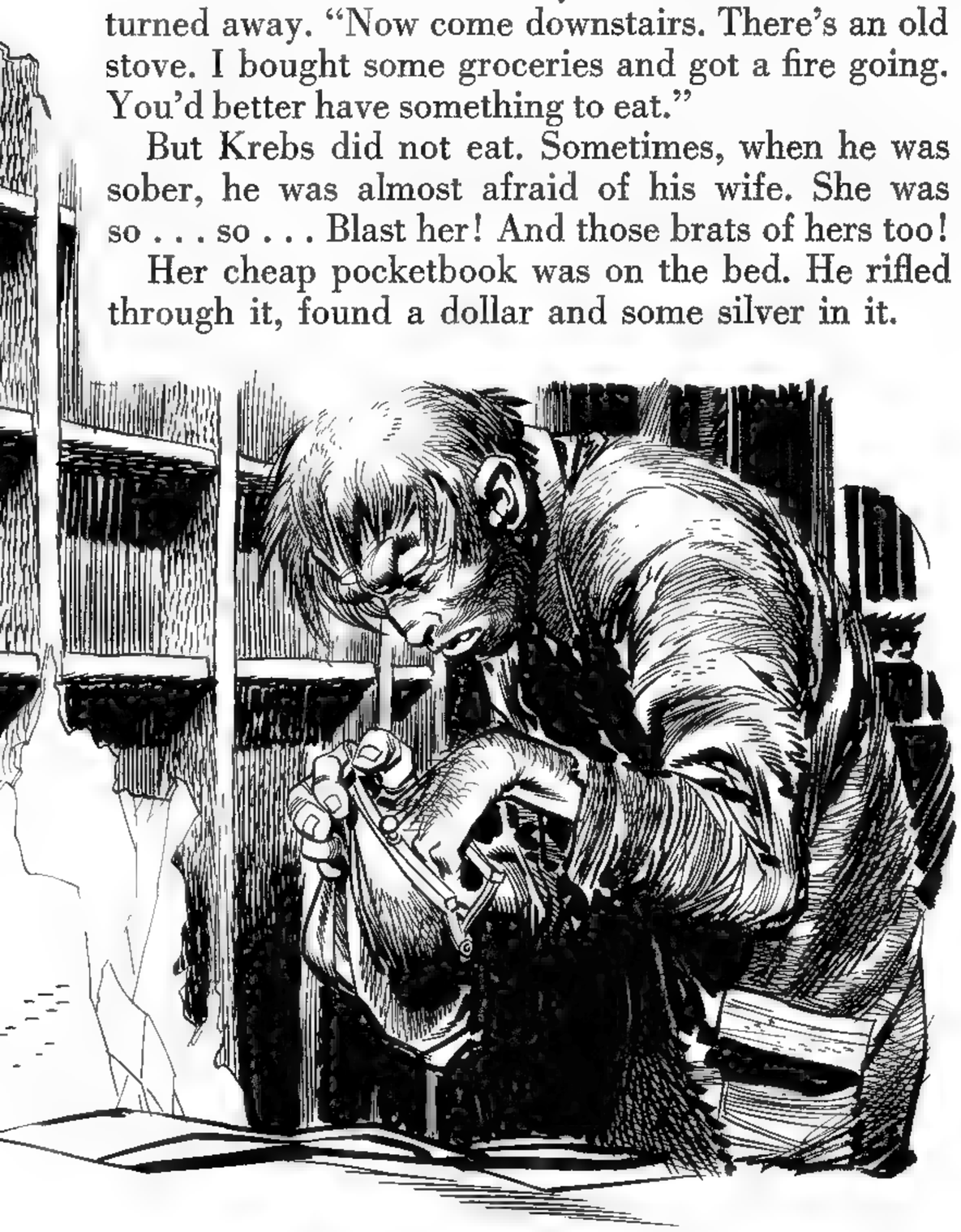
"Get out of my way!" he snarled.

"No, Frank!" The mother was rock.

"Remember what I told you, Frank," she hissed. "I don't care what you do to me. Not any more. But you'll never hurt them. They're all I've got. And I'll take care of them. Always. Remember . . ." She turned away. "Now come downstairs. There's an old stove. I bought some groceries and got a fire going. You'd better have something to eat."

But Krebs did not eat. Sometimes, when he was sober, he was almost afraid of his wife. She was so . . . so . . . Blast her! And those brats of hers too!

Her cheap pocketbook was on the bed. He rifled through it, found a dollar and some silver in it.

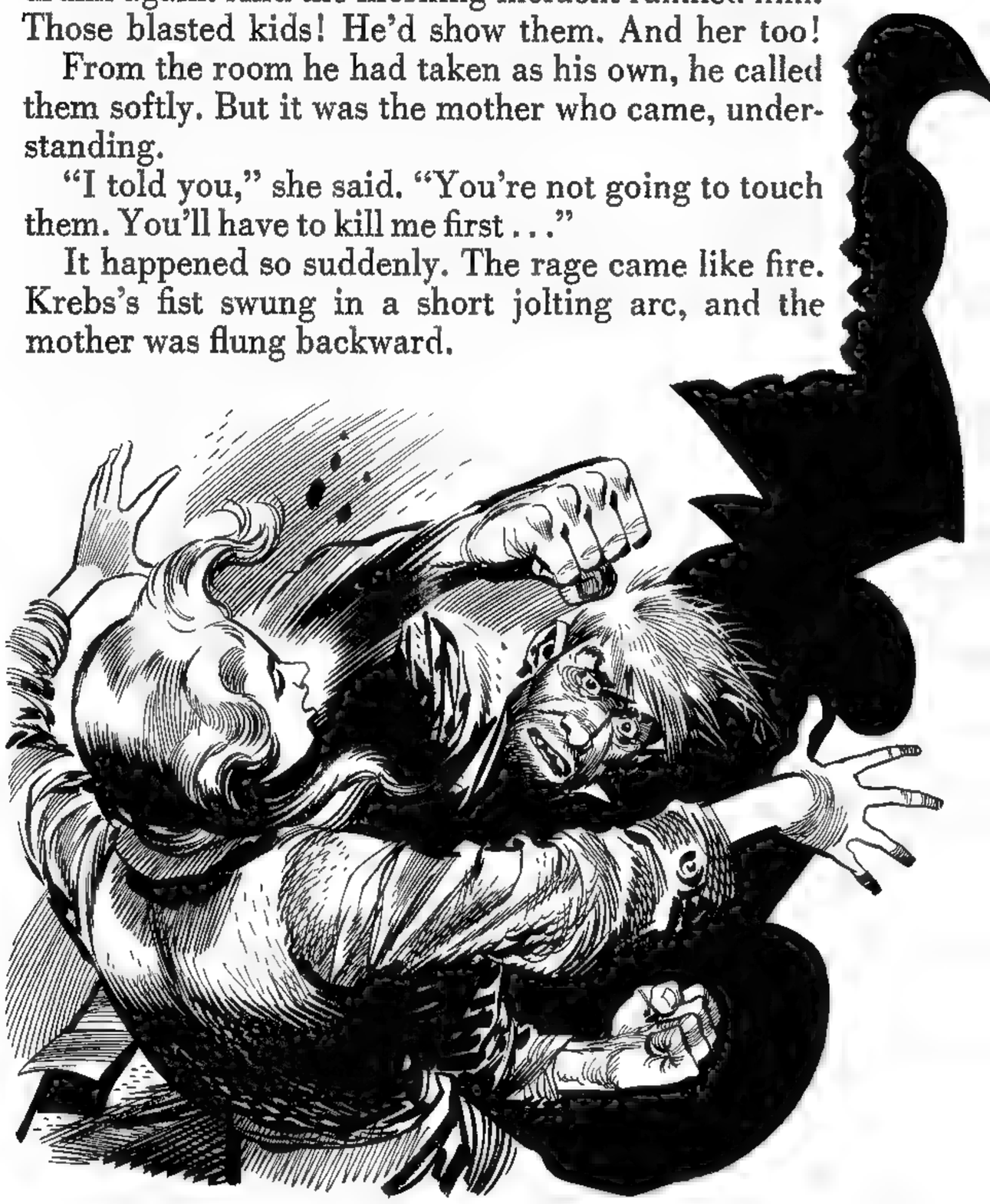


Then he went out. When he came back, he was drunk again. And the morning incident rankled him. Those blasted kids! He'd show them. And her too!

From the room he had taken as his own, he called them softly. But it was the mother who came, understanding.

"I told you," she said. "You're not going to touch them. You'll have to kill me first . . ."

It happened so suddenly. The rage came like fire. Krebs's fist swung in a short jolting arc, and the mother was flung backward.



Her head slammed against the foot of the bed, and she sunk to the floor. Blood seeped slowly into the splintered boards.

And behind Krebs, there was a scratching. The rat had come out of its hole and now sat on its haunches, watching him.

Suddenly, Krebs was sober. Suddenly he was on his knees beside his wife, shaking her, screaming at her:

"Get up, get up, get up . . ."

Only she would never get up. Because the mother was dead. He'd killed her.

He sat there stupidly beside her in an alcoholic daze. And the rat watched.

Until Krebs stumbled to his feet, and kicked at it viciously, and it dove twittering back into its hole.

Krebs stayed in his room all that day. It was not until night, until the children had cried themselves to sleep upon their bed of rags, that he left the old house. There was a lumberyard he knew . . .

When he staggered back, he was carrying a stolen hundred pound sack of builders' plaster.

Breaking down the wall in the room where he slept was easy. All it meant was enlarging the opening he had already put in it. But there was the rat . . .

It appeared suddenly. And it watched. It watched, twittering and restless, as he tore down the moldy plaster and the rotting lath underneath. It watched when he stooped and lifted the corpse and carried it awkwardly to the wall. And then, suddenly, it leaped . . .

For a wild horrible moment, its teeth were tearing at Krebs's throat, its claws ripping for a foothold on his liquor-stained filthy clothing.

The corpse fell, thrashing stiffly. Krebs sprawled. And the fetid breath of the thing was in his nostrils; its slavering yellow fangs were slashing at his jugular vein.

His fist smashed down on the rat's spine like a hammer.

The rat shuddered from the blow and lay still.

Krebs struggled to his feet, his breath coming in great rasping sobs, his intestines writhing.

It took hours to hide the corpse behind a wall of fresh plaster, cunningly smeared and splattered with dirt so that it looked as old and as scabrous as the other walls.

Then Krebs turned back to the rat. But it was gone. It had been stunned, not killed.

In the morning, Krebs went to the children.

"Your mother's gone," he told them brutally. And between their tortured, unbelieving sobs: "She ran out on you! Like I always knew she would!"

The policeman he found later believed his story. And why not? One look at him . . .

That same afternoon, a woman from the Welfare Board came and took the children away.

They went with her, whimpering, and Krebs breathed a sigh of relief. He hadn't realized how taut his nerves had become. He needed a drink. Lots of drinks. But money was a problem.

He solved that problem, though. There was a woman he followed into the park. A woman who screamed when he snatched her purse and ran . . .

In the purse, there was more than eighty dollars. And so, that night, Krebs brought two dozen bottles of fiery whiskey to the bedroom. Within an hour, he was sodden. Within two, he was in a drunken stupor, asleep on the grimy bed.

But he awoke. Suddenly. To the smell of fetid breath. To see two tiny red fires, burning in the darkness. Eyes!

The rat perched on the ragged pillow beside his head, black lips drawn back in a snarl of hate. Another moment and those yellow teeth would have sunk into Krebs's throat . . .

Krebs screamed. Out of sudden horror.

The rat vanished. But it did not go far. Near its hole, it stopped, sat up to stare at him. With a baleful look that was calculating, cunning, and patient . . .

Patient!

That was when Krebs first began to suspect.

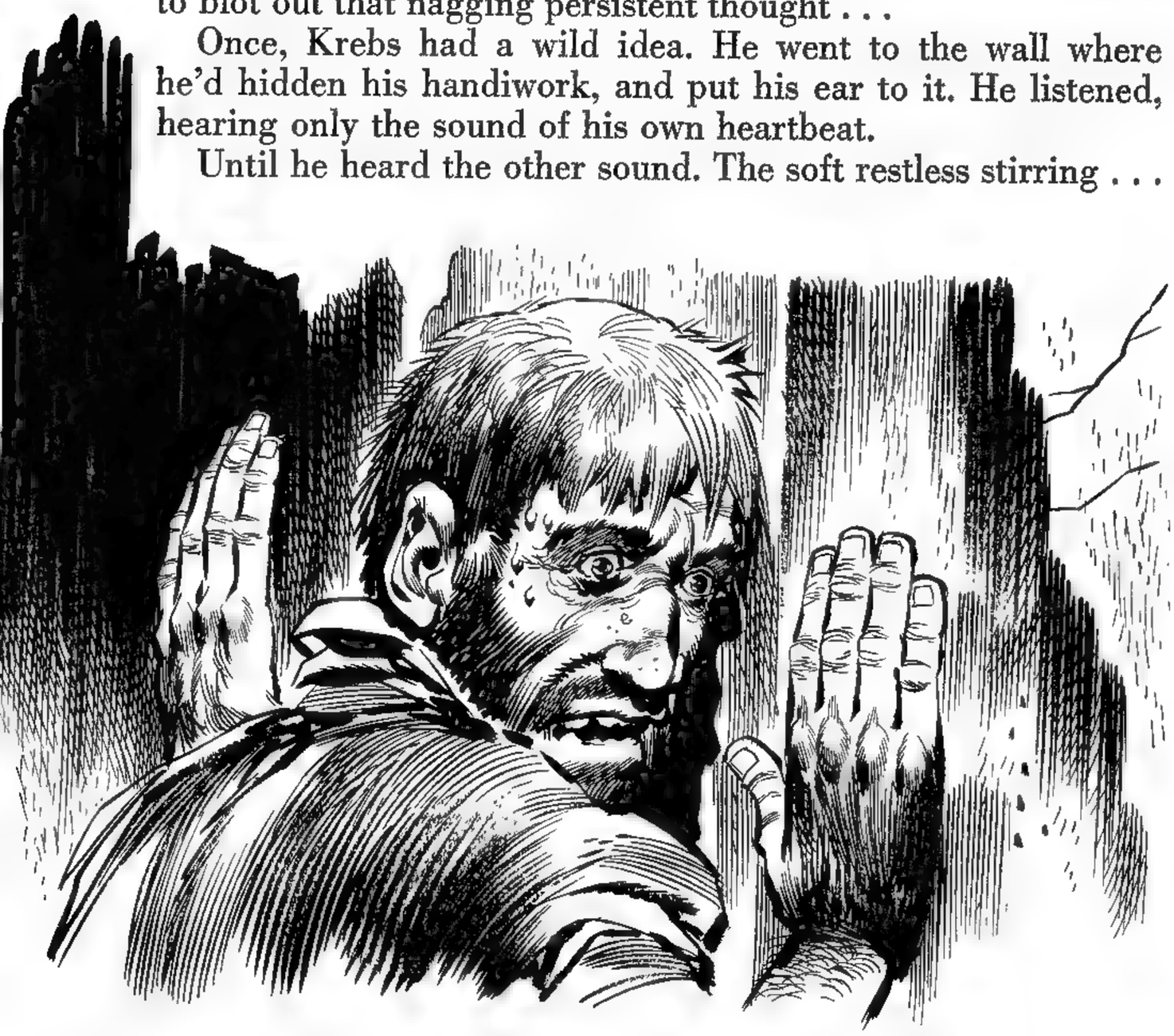
"You!" he breathed. "You!"

But that was insane! A corpse is a corpse! The life, the hate of a dead woman does not enter the body of a rat!

And yet, afterward, the rat was always there. The two dozen bottles dwindled to ten, eight. But drunkenness was not enough to blot out that nagging persistent thought . . .

Once, Krebs had a wild idea. He went to the wall where he'd hidden his handiwork, and put his ear to it. He listened, hearing only the sound of his own heartbeat.

Until he heard the other sound. The soft restless stirring . . .



The rat drew back a little, but otherwise, it did not move. It watched. Perpetually. A hundred times during the long black nights, it crawled up onto the filthy bed; a hundred times, Krebs waited until it was close to his throat . . . and then struck savagely. But always, the rat avoided the blow. Always, it returned to stare, and wait, patiently.

There was no doubt, after a while, that the rat was stalking Krebs. It chilled him. But he could not leave. Not so long as there was that patient look in the rat's eyes. Not so long as the rat lived. It was a contest . . . a duel. In Krebs's clouded brain, the rat became his wife, and his wife became the rat. He set traps for it, contrived killing snares. But the rat avoided them. Twice, he plugged its hole in the wall with shards of broken glass so that the rat could not dive to safety in time of danger. But those yellow fangs created new holes.

Some nights, Krebs lay on his bed, bottle in hand, and spoke to the rat. Placatingly. Almost pleadingly. "Please," he would slobber. "Leave me alone. I . . . I never hurt the kids!" And when the rat would remain immobile, the bottle would suddenly be hurled, to splinter against floor or wall. And Krebs would scream: "All right! So you were a good mother! Well you weren't good enough to keep me from sending your brats to a home, were you? You think you'll get revenge, don't you? But you won't! I'll kill you first! I'll kill . . . you . . ."

No! The dead are dead! The rat! It must be the rat! Moving inside the wall!

But the rat sat at the other end of the room, snarling.

And each time that Krebs went to the wall, the rat snarled. As if it knew!

"You said . . . you'd take care of the kids!" Krebs yelled at it finally. "All right! The kids are gone! Why don't you go find them? Leave me alone!"

Only . . . only . . . hadn't he already *done* that? Sometimes he remembered. Other times he didn't. His head spun in alcoholic confusion. He would have to kill the rat. That much he knew. So he planned its death cunningly, shrewd with whiskey. But his plans never worked.

Finally, there was a night when Krebs drank too much, even for him. He pounded on the wall, daring his wife to come out, daring the rat to come out.

And it did. It darted between his legs, and when Krebs went after it, he stumbled and fell.

It was not a deep slash. He had luckily stirred too soon. But the next time.

There could be no next time! Next time, the rat would win! If he remained as he was . . .

Krebs drank no more that night. Dulled as his senses were, he knew enough for that. Despite the burning, yearning ache deep in his gut, he did not touch the last of the full bottles. Not that night nor the next day. By then, he was stone sober.

In the cellar, he found the tarnished remains of an old brass lamp.

He lay on the musty rotten floor, unable to move, paralyzed with drink.

And it was only the pain that woke him from his lethargy. He put a hand to his throat, stupidly. And his fingers brushed furry softness, came away wet.

Blood. His blood. The rat . . .

He screamed.

And the rat scurried away . . .

The lamp stand, ripped from its base, made a heavy, four foot long club of solid metal.

There was a grim resolve in Krebs's every move when he climbed the rotting staircase with its rickety balustrade to the bedroom.

Claws skittered all about him as he walked. But those rats did not matter. Only *the* rat mattered!

By the flickering light of the candle stub, Krebs sat in the dismal bedroom later . . . waiting.

And in time, the rat's lumpy body crawled out of its hole in the wall . . .

Krebs struck. The brass pole splintered the rotten flooring. Again! Again! And still again! Wild, seemingly aimless blows that the rat dodged easily. But there was a method to Krebs's attack. Each blow drove the rat closer to the open bedroom door. And at last, there was no place else for it to go.

It dodged through the opening, avoiding a savage final assault.

Then . . . it paused. It reared back, bristling spine against the peeling balustrade. And Krebs grinned his triumph.

"I was right," he hissed. "You won't leave this room, will you? You won't leave your body, will you? You *are* her, aren't you? *You are!*"

It was so simple. Always, the rat had appeared in that bedroom! *No where else!*

"Now, we'll see!" Krebs stood in the doorway. "C'mon! Let's see you get back inside!"

The brass club was raised, ready. Krebs was almost crooning now.

"C'mon! C'mon, c'mon, come on . . ."

He could even smile. "Come on, little . . . *Mother!* You want your revenge, don't you? You want to pay me back for what I did to your brats, don't you?"

The rat did not move. Only its beady eyes flickered. As if it were planning. Calculating . . .

The rat leaped. But not toward the door. Toward the stairs. Krebs swung, turning half around in his eagerness. The club struck, and rebounded from the floor. And at that moment, when he was off balance, with his back to the balustrade, the rat attacked. One incredibly quick turn, and it was in the air, eyes balefully afire, fangs gleaming.

Krebs dropped the club, threw up his arms, and the impact of the rat's body drove him back so that he had to grasp at the balustrade for support.

The balustrade . . . which broke beneath his weight with a rotten, dry, tearing gasp.

Krebs dropped into nothingness, screaming. The brass pole fell after him.

Krebs struck first.

Flat on his back, so that his spine was shattered in a dozen places.

Just before the jagged end of the brass pole pinned him to the floor.

From above, the rat looked down. But Krebs did not move. Slowly, the baleful fire vanished from the rat's eyes.

Content, the rat turned, went back into the bedroom, to its hole in the wall. It moved slowly. There was no need to hurry. Not any more. The intruder was no longer cause for concern.

Through the tunnel gnawed in the moldy lath. Past the corpse rotting slowly in the darkness . . .

The rat quickened its pace.

To the nest, where four miniature replicas of itself waited.

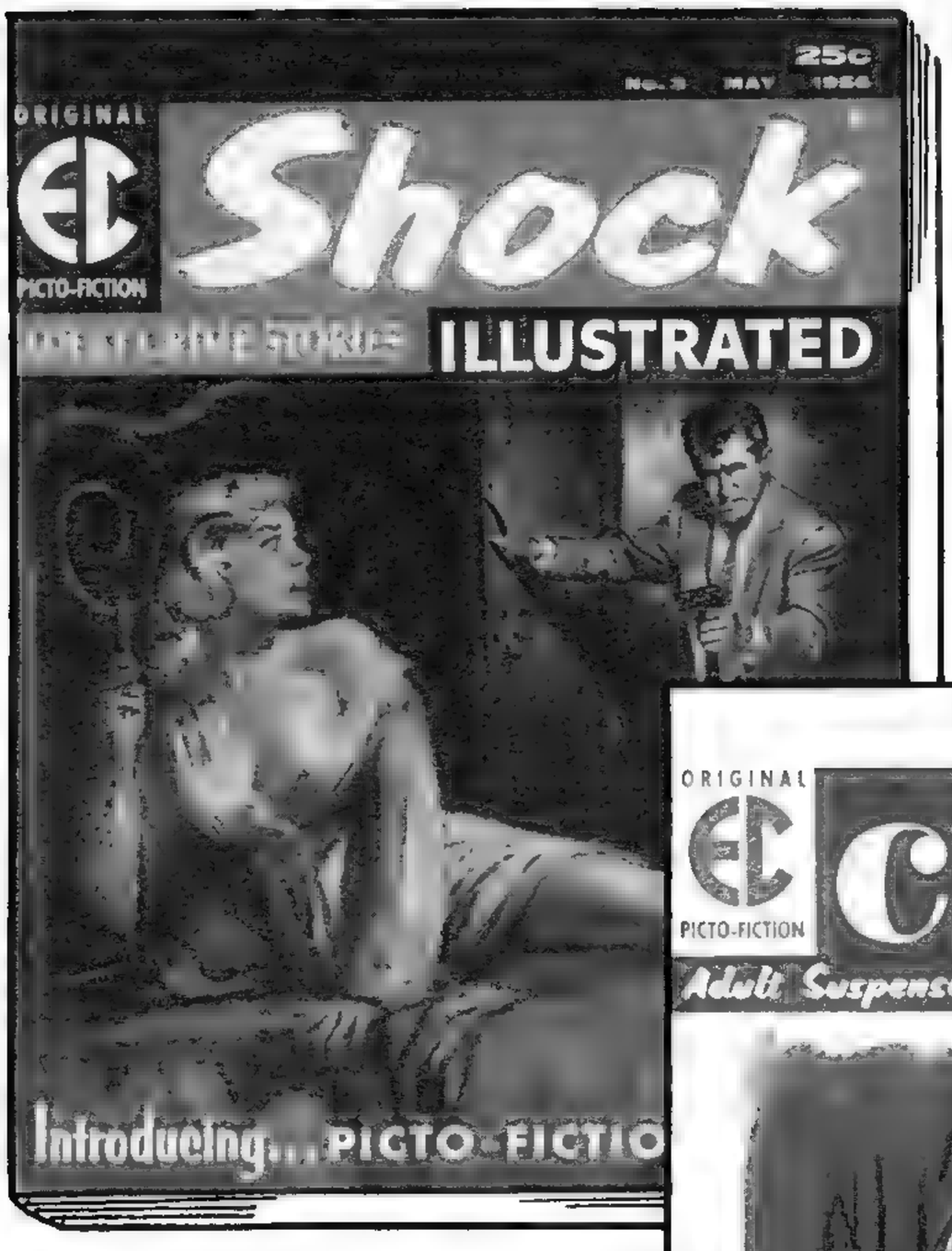
The rat's babies were hungry. And now that the danger to them had been removed, there was no other thought in the tiny brain of . . . the mother.

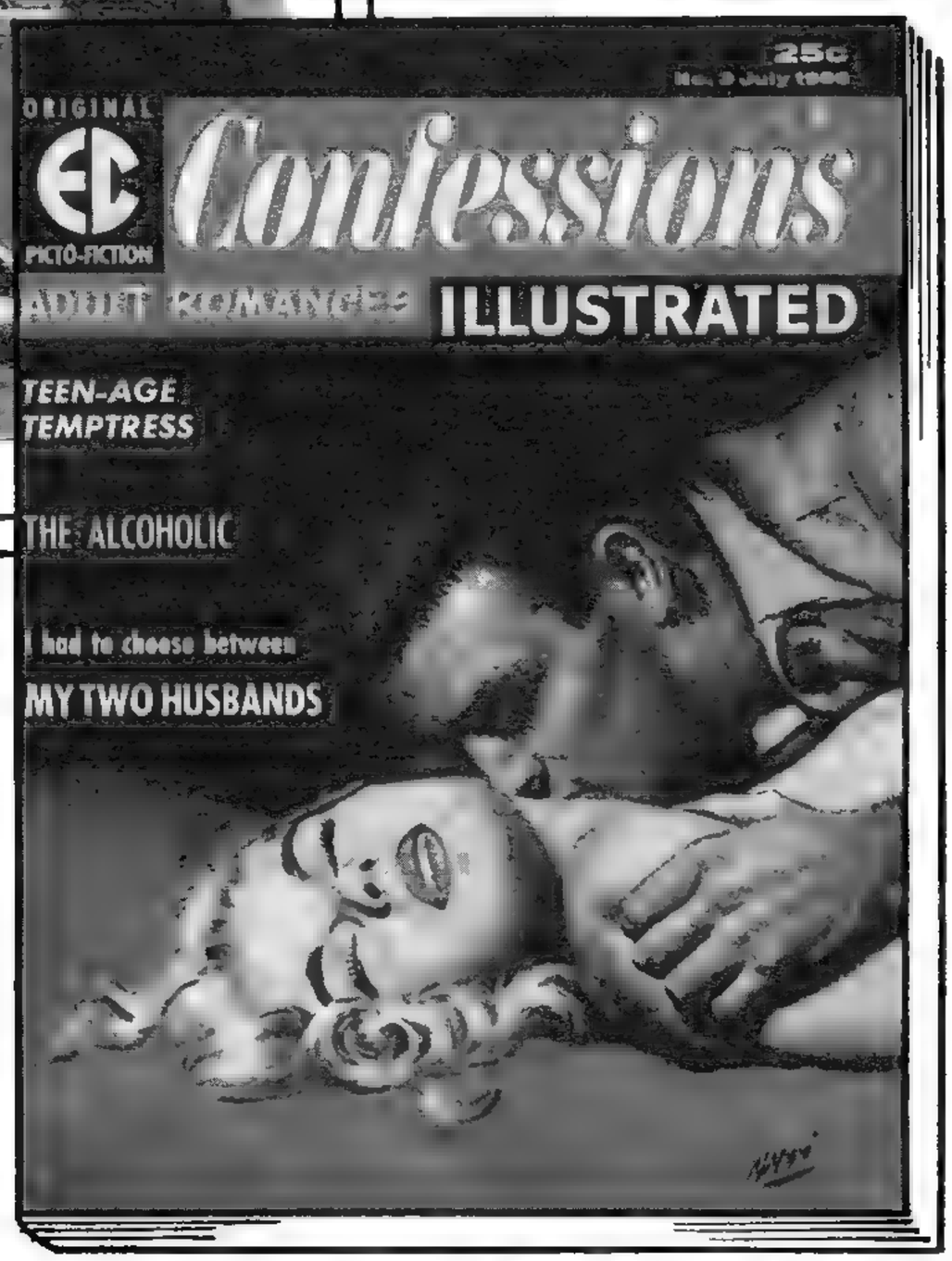
THE END

THERE ARE THREE MORE

E.C.

"PICTO-FICTION" MAGAZINES!





"Picto-Fiction" is adult reading entertainment at its best!

If you like this magazine, you'll like them all!

ON SALE NOW!

LOOK FOR THEM AT YOUR NEWSSTAND!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sirs,

This new medium of story-telling is the most unusual that has ever hit America's newsstands. It is an honor to extend my deepest congratulations to those people who are responsible for introducing "Picto-Fiction" to the public.

Don Planas

Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Editors:

I was somewhat disappointed when you discontinued your old horror and crime comics, and though I read a few issues of your new magazines, I wasn't particularly attracted to any of them. But then, yesterday, I bought the first issue of ADULT TALES OF TERROR, and the old days seem to be coming back. Every good wish to you with your new "Picto-Fiction" line.

Irving Glassman

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Dear Sir,

I read your first issue of ADULT TALES OF TERROR, and I liked the magazine very much. Thank you for some very exciting hours of entertainment.

Mrs. Andy Hainer

Tipton, Mo.

Gentlemen:

I bought your new magazine just as soon as I saw it on the bookshelf. Thank you sincerely for publishing spine-tingling material again. I love it. What I can't understand is why people buy magazines like ADULT TALES OF TERROR, read them, and then gripe and growl about them. If they don't like material like that, why in Heaven's name can't they leave it for the people who do? Please keep publishing more and more.

F. G.

Atlanta, Ga.

Dear Editor;

I enjoyed your new E. C. Terror magazine very much, and I especially like the "Picto-Fiction" style of presentation. The magazine was very good for a first issue, and I'm sure it will increase in quality with each succeeding one. I rate "The Gorilla's Paw" in the first issue as the best story, with "The Basket" as a close second.

Jerry McHone

Asheville, N. C.

Dear Editors;

Purchased your new magazine, ADULT TALES OF TERROR ILLUSTRATED on the corner newsstand today, and to put it mildly, I was very pleased with the first issue. Being an old E. C. fan of six years experience, might I offer a suggestion? I wish you would loosen up a little. Your new mag, while good, is a might too sophisticated. But, all in all, you have a great idea in "Picto-Fiction." Keep up the high quality and lots of luck. Your first cover was really outstanding.

Jack Promo

Detroit, Mich.

Gentlemen:

"Picto-Fiction" is the best yet. Keep up the good work. I am waiting breathlessly for the next issue.

Donald Sparkle

Hanover, Pa.

Dear Mr. Feldstein:

I think I must have been particularly lucky when, yesterday, quite by chance, I happened to pick up a copy of your new magazine ADULT TALES OF TERROR. I devoured every word of it. I loved it. It's about time somebody started publishing something for people who have the desire and the intestinal fortitude for this kind of subject matter. Who wants peaches and cream all the time? I am quite enthusiastic about this kind of material. Thanks.

Katherine H. Richards

Chula Vista, Calif.

Dear Editors,

You asked for it. This is what we think of your new TERROR ILLUSTRATED. In our family, we call them the "Horribles." And boys, you're slipping. Your old comic yarns were head and shoulders above the stories in your new attempt. The only real inducement to spend another quarter is Feldstein's stories. Not to be brutal, but we know you can do better than this first issue. We have always loved E.C.'s, and appreciated the intelligent productions of your whole line, so don't let us down. Give us escape reading with a hint of plausability. Good luck. We know an editor's life is a hectic one, and we're with you, all five in this family.

Mrs. Rita Gingrich & all

Pensicola, Fla.

Gentlemen:

Needless to say, your ingenious new presentation "Picto-Fiction" is a sheer delight. I enjoyed every page. The art work was extraordinary. And the stories were terrific. I assume that you will be publishing other magazines in the "Picto-Fiction" medium, and I would like to know what they will be. I wouldn't want to miss them. Thanks for a thoroughly enjoyable new experience in reading entertainment.

Ralph Peterson

Chicago, Ill.

The ad on the preceding page should answer your question, Ralph.—ed.

Dear Editor,

Ever since I have grown out of comics, I have longed for a picture-story type of magazine that would satisfy my enthusiasm for good illustration and good stories. Your "Picto-Fiction" is the perfect answer.

Shirley Berkowitz

Philadelphia, Pa.

Sirs:

I have read both of your latest magazines, CRIME ILLUSTRATED and TERROR ILLUSTRATED. They are not magazines, but are instead the highest and most advanced form of Brainrot on the market today. Do not look upon this letter as being the work of a crank or a crackpot, because I assure you it is not. But the stories and thoughts that these magazines contain are truly the work of Satan. Unfortunately, the minds of some people are highly susceptible to the various diseases of the brain, and I am afraid that these magazines are a breeding place for these diseases. A mighty dam can be destroyed if but one drop of water eases itself through a crack. That drop will be followed by the torrent which will destroy it. Consider this letter as the first drop.

Anonymous

Boston, Mass.

Dear Editors,

My hat is off to you for a great new form of escapist literature. There is nothing better I like to do after a hard day's work than curl up with an easy-reading, spine-tingling, mystery story. And your magazine has five of the best I ever read.

Stan Franklin

St. Louis, Mo.

Please address all correspondence to: Terror Illustrated, Room 706, Dept. 3, 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N.Y.

KID STUFF

The children found the coffin . . . and what it contained . . . quite by accident.

They had been playing among the tumbled headstones, so old that the edges had long since been worn smooth by wind and rain . . . and suddenly they were falling. Suddenly the ground beneath their feet was no longer firm, and they were part of a mad cascade of earth and pebbles and ancient weather-beaten monuments falling into an abyss.

GEORGE R. EVANS

" 'Liss! Where are you? 'Liss?"

The boy was on his feet first, scratched and bruised, but otherwise all right. Except for the sudden fear which made him forget the habit of his short lifetime so that he now screamed his sister's full name: "Melissa! Answer me! Where are you? Please!"

"I'm here, Joey! Here! A small tattered figure rose from the rubble. "I'm all right!"

At nine, the human body is resilient, not easily damaged.

"What happened, Joey?" Melissa whispered.

"What happened? A cave-in, o' course!" Now that the thirteen-year-old was certain that his sister was as she should be, he drew himself up to the full lofty height of his four years of seniority over her. "There must've been a hole or something underneath where we were playing . . ."

Interested, Joey turned to survey his new surroundings. The fallen earth had made a steep incline to the upper world; there would be no difficulty in climbing out. And the sunlight, stabbing down through the opening above, vaguely illuminated the blackness beyond. Joey peered into it.

"Say, Look! No . . . over there, silly! There's a big box!" He turned 'Liss and pointed.

The "box" stood deep in shadows at the far end of the underground cavern.

"C'mon," he whispered. "Let's see . . ."

Hand in hand, Joey and Melissa walked to the box. They could see it more clearly as they moved nearer. Long, and split here and there so that rusted hand-wrought iron nails showed. And open. Yawning open.

Suddenly Joey stopped, pulling back 'Liss.

"It's . . . a coffin!" he gasped.

But it was already too late, then. They were too close. They could see!

Inside the coffin, there was a layer of damp earth. And on that earth . . .

A skeleton, a rotted corpse would have been horrible! But this . . . this transcended all horror!

The man in the coffin seemed to smile. His face was pink, his unseeing eyes stared sightlessly into the gloom.

The sound which came from the boy's throat might have been made by an animal. Wildly, insanely, he ran . . . dragging the whimpering 'Liss with him. Up the steep incline. Scrambling, fighting, clutching . . .

Up into the bright sunshine. Crying, moaning, sobbing. And away . . .

Until the old, long-abandoned cemetery was far behind. Then, and only then, did the boy fall on his belly in the shade of a tree, breathless, with 'Liss sobbing beside him.

It was her sobs which brought him back to reality. He patted her awkwardly.

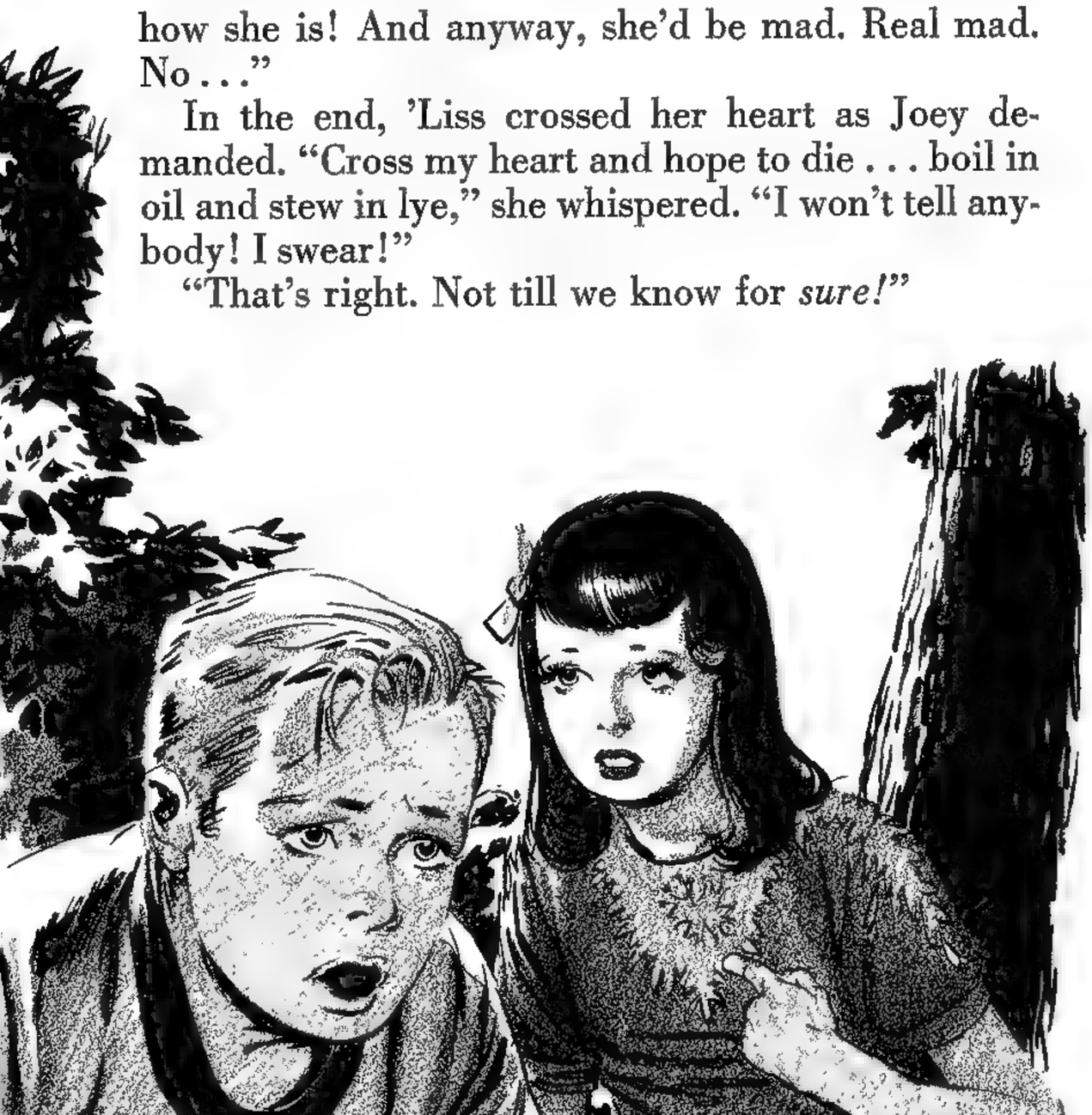
"It's all right, 'Liss," he said, trying to soothe her terror. "It's all right."

After a while, the whimpering ceased. Then the boy sat silent, thinking. Problems of such magnitude do not come often to the very young.

"You think we ought to go home and tell Mom?" he asked. "No! She wouldn't believe us! You know how she is! And anyway, she'd be mad. Real mad. No . . ."

In the end, 'Liss crossed her heart as Joey demanded. "Cross my heart and hope to die . . . boil in oil and stew in lye," she whispered. "I won't tell anybody! I swear!"

"That's right. Not till we know for *sure!*"



But what it was that they had to know for sure Joey would not explain. And all the way home, he was thoughtful. He hardly noticed when they left the fields and cut across the highway that led to the quaint cluster of middle-class suburban houses, one of which was where he and 'Liss lived.

"Joey! 'Liss! Oh, just look at you!" Their mother stared at dirt, torn clothes, bruises . . .

"It . . . it was an accident, Mom. We . . . fell!"

"You've been playing in that filthy old cemetery again!" This was an old cry with Joey's mother.

"Whatever am I going to do to you?" she sighed. "Can't you find any other place to play?"

But how to explain to an adult the delights of steep hills and wooded places, and the myriad uses of leaning and tumbled tombstones? As forts, pirate ships, blockhouses?

"I'm sorry, Mom . . ."

"Sorry? You get upstairs and get cleaned up. Both of you. I'll have something to tell your father when he comes home."

Only by the time Joey's father came home, the incident had been forgotten, of course. Because Joey's father worked hard. He was a mechanic, who rose before dawn to catch an early commuter's special into the city, and returned late, tired. And his wife loved him. Too much to spoil his evenings.

He noticed the children's silence at dinner, however. With one hand, he reached over to rumple Joey's hair, smiling.

"What's the matter, son? Cat got your tongue."

Joey studied him.

"Dad, what's a vampire?" he asked suddenly. "I mean . . . what exactly? I know they drink blood and things like that, but what *are* they, *really?*"

"Joey!" his mother gasped. "What an awful thing to discuss at the dinner table!"

"Why do you ask, son?" Joey's father said.

"Oh, I was just wonderin' . . ."

"Then stop wondering!" Joey's father was being very stern now. "A boy your age shouldn't be thinking about horrible superstitious nonsense!"

"I'm surprised at you," he shook his head, "mentioning anything like that in front of your baby sister! No more of it! You hear?"

Joey's lips clamped shut. He'd known that his mother would be upset by his question. But it was a rarity when his father reprimanded him like this. Hereafter, he would keep his own counsel.

Joey did not know that his father and mother spoke together later, after he and 'Liss had gone to bed. Joey was hugging his intolerable secret, thinking about it, and wondering, while downstairs, his father paced back and forth.

"Vampires!" he snapped. "Dorothy, how did they hear? We've been so careful not to let them know what's been happening!"

"Nothing *has* been happening," his wife scoffed. "Ben, really! Just because a few stray animals . . . a cat and a dog or two . . . have been found dead . . ."

"Dead . . . and drained of their blood! You've heard the gossip just as much as I have!"

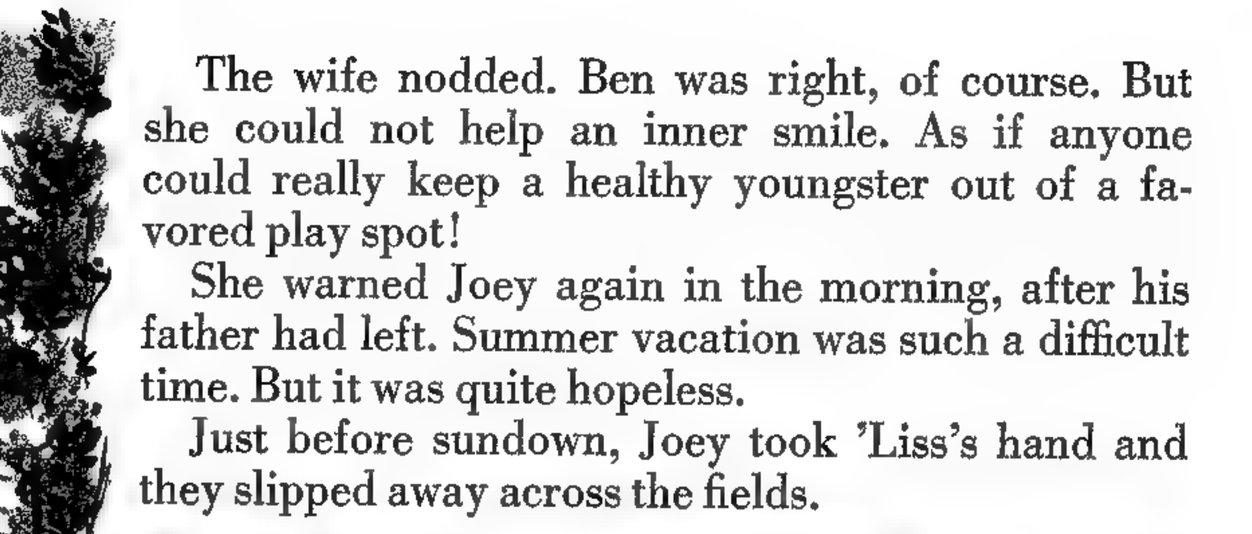
"That there's a vampire in the neighborhood? Of all the asinine . . ."

"Asinine or not," said the father, "I won't have my children's heads filled with such crazy thoughts! I've told you a hundred times! It's that cemetery they play in! I don't believe in vampires any more than you do. But, between the stories, and playing there, Joey is thinking things that aren't healthy for a boy his age to be thinking. I want them kept out of that miserable place! Understand?"

The wife nodded. Ben was right, of course. But she could not help an inner smile. As if anyone could really keep a healthy youngster out of a favored play spot!

She warned Joey again in the morning, after his father had left. Summer vacation was such a difficult time. But it was quite hopeless.

Just before sundown, Joey took 'Liss's hand and they slipped away across the fields.



"But, Joey," 'Liss insisted as they walked. "I don't want to go to the old cemetery. Do we have to?"

"Sure we do," Joey whispered into the twilight. "We've got to see if *he's* still there, don't we? What if he really *is* a vampire?"

Joey was not quite certain what a vampire was, but he'd heard the word and he'd heard certain connotations.

"We've got to decide what to do, don't we?" he said boldly, to impress 'Liss.

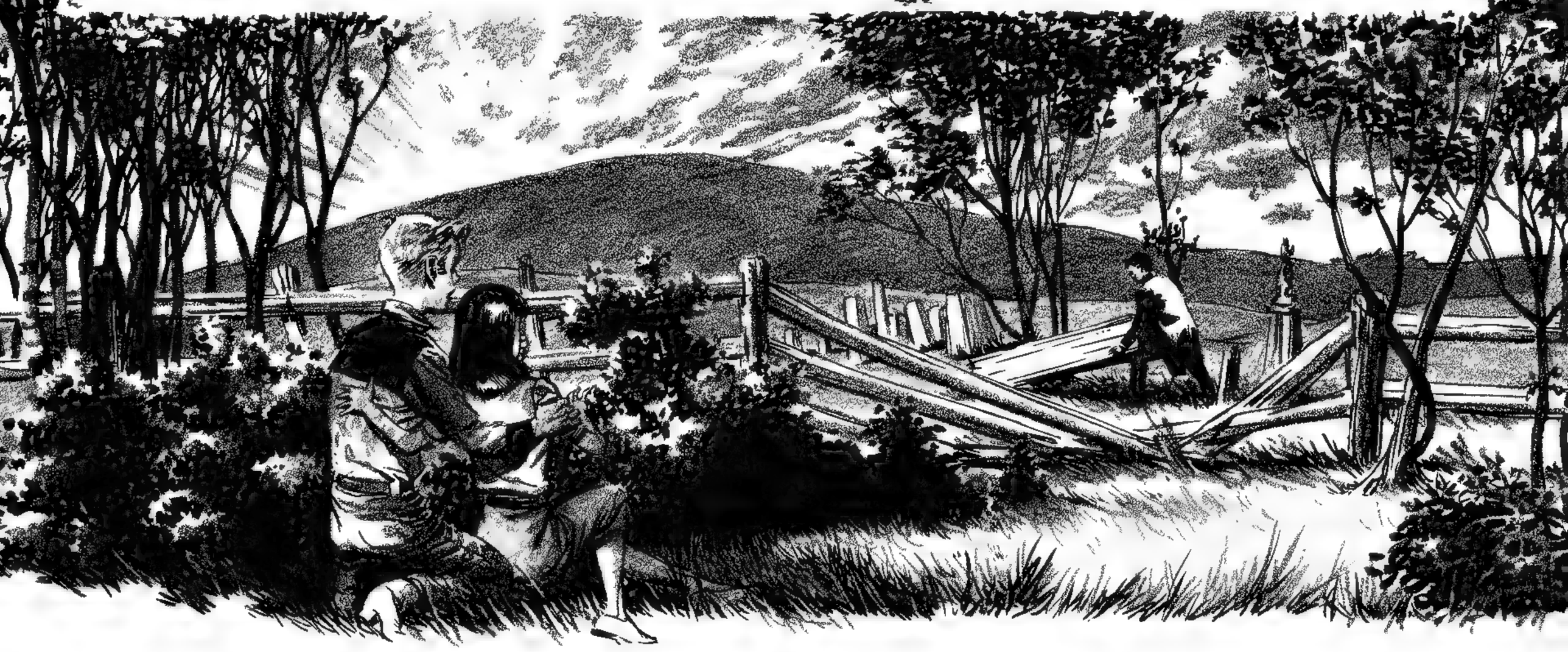
It was easy to be bold, there in the evening fields, with the crickets chirping about them.

It was not so easy later, when they caught their first glimpse of the tumbled gravestones through the trees ahead, white in the newly-risen moonlight.

"Joey! Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . ." The words came out of 'Liss's mouth suddenly, like bullets. "Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . ."

There was someone in the cemetery. A man. He had his back to them, and he was straining, tugging at something. Joey's actions were the fruit of blind instinct. He pushed 'Liss down and clamped a hand over her mouth.

"Be quiet," he hissed. "It's *him!*"



A leaning headstone obscured their view for just a moment. Then the man in the cemetery came into sight again. The thing he was dragging was a coffin. The one with the split plank sides, half filled with damp black earth. Joey could see him clearly. It was hot and the man was working hard, but he was not sweating. Even in the moonlight, his pink skin looked cool and somehow . . . cold.

"He's *moving* it!" Joey gasped. "He's moving his coffin! He . . ."

The rest of what Joey tried to say was strangled. Terror touched his vocal cords and they froze. From then on, he watched in silence . . . while the man dragged the coffin to the old, crazily leaning mausoleum in one corner of the ancient cemetery.

"Why? Why is he moving it?" Somehow, Joey got the words out. And with them came the answer. "Us! He must know about us! He must know we saw him!"

The man dragged the coffin up the mausoleum step, and it echoed hollowly as he moved inside.

There. The man was coming out of the mausoleum now. Joey could see his pale eyes. Those same eyes . . .

"Oh . . . oh . . . oh . . ." That was Melissa again. She did not understand. But fear is an instinct. It beat at her with black wings, screamed in her head . . .

Melissa leaped up, and ran. And Joey followed. That first time, he'd fled from the unknown. This time, it was worse. This time, he waited to feel the vampire's hands on his shoulders, listened for the pounding footfalls which would tell him that the vampire had seen them.

He thought of the thing as a vampire, now! It was! It was, it was! And because it was, his fear was ungovernable. So he ran . . . and ran . . . and ran.

But afterward, when there was no pursuit, when he knew that the vampire had not seen them, he could think again.

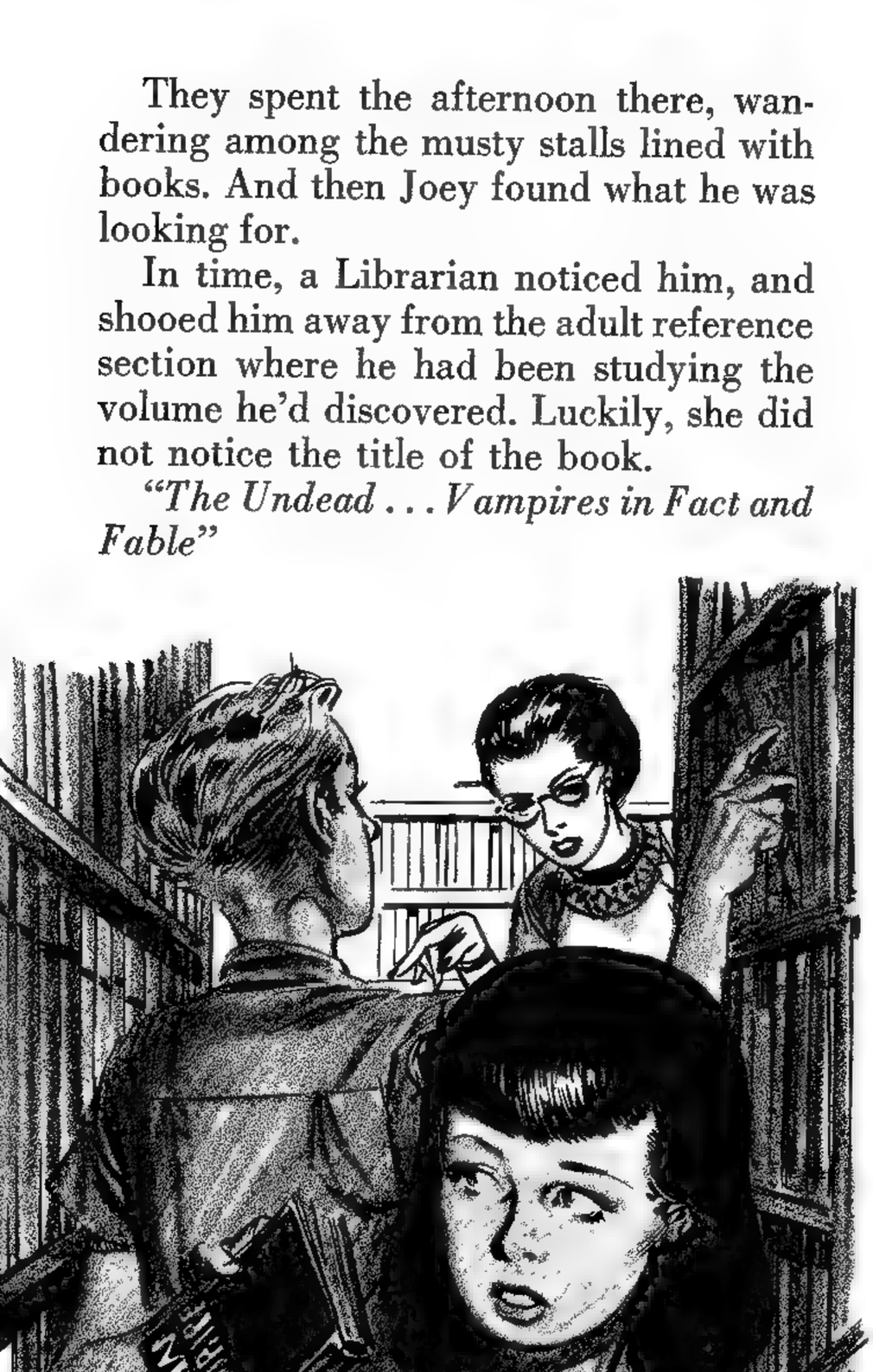
He and Melissa went home.

But the next day, he walked with her to the village Library.

They spent the afternoon there, wandering among the musty stalls lined with books. And then Joey found what he was looking for.

In time, a Librarian noticed him, and shooed him away from the adult reference section where he had been studying the volume he'd discovered. Luckily, she did not notice the title of the book.

"The Undead . . . Vampires in Fact and Fable"

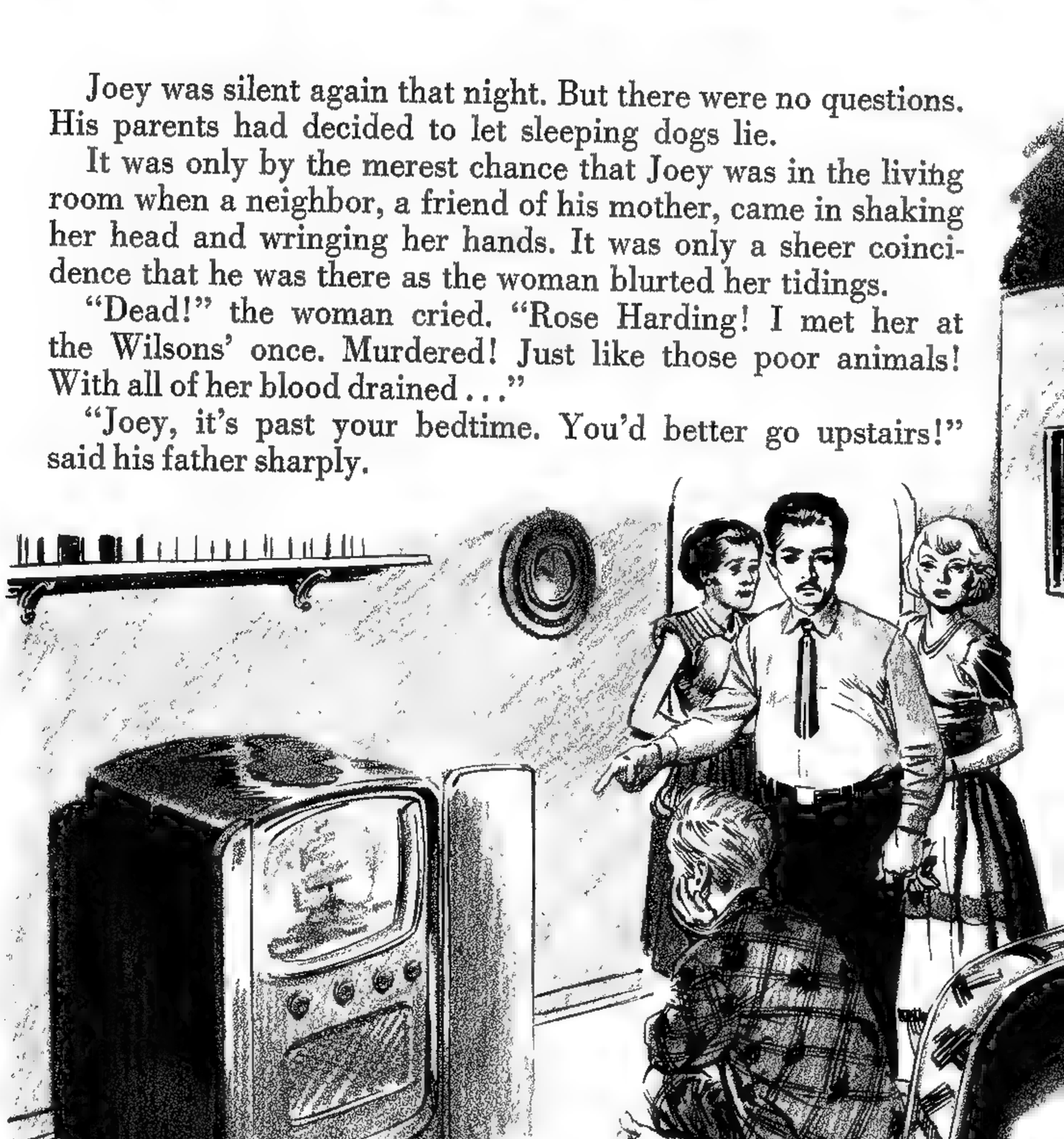


Joey was silent again that night. But there were no questions. His parents had decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

It was only by the merest chance that Joey was in the living room when a neighbor, a friend of his mother, came in shaking her head and wringing her hands. It was only a sheer coincidence that he was there as the woman blurted her tidings.

"Dead!" the woman cried. "Rose Harding! I met her at the Wilsons' once. Murdered! Just like those poor animals! With all of her blood drained . . ."

"Joey, it's past your bedtime. You'd better go upstairs!" said his father sharply.



Joey's father was angry at the woman, but he managed to smile at her. After all. She was a neighbor. "Little pitchers have big ears, Mrs. Stone," he said. "We don't like Joey to hear about such things."

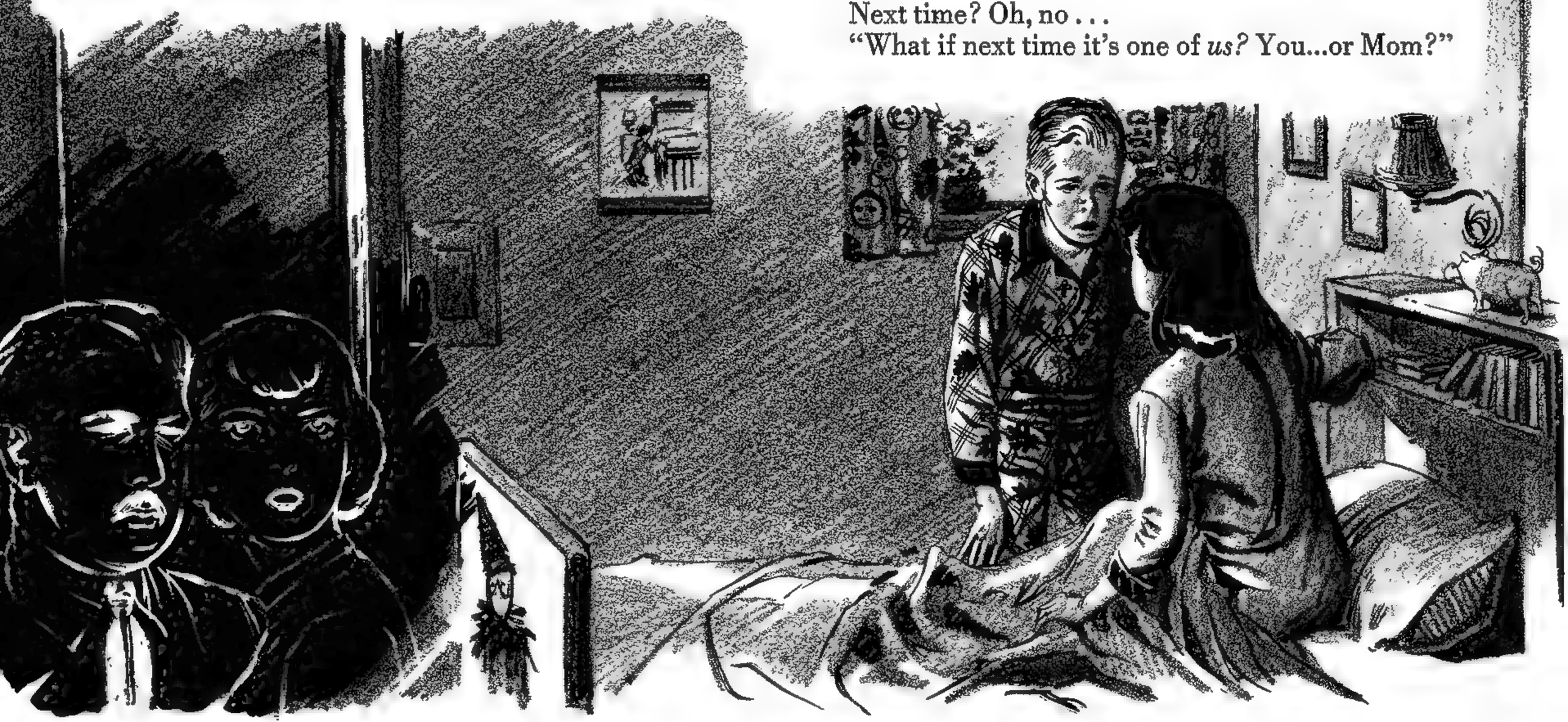
'Liss was already in bed, half asleep, when Joey shook her. " 'Liss! Wake up, 'Liss!" he whispered.

It was not that 'Liss comprehended, really. She was an ally. And Joey needed an ally. He spoke to her, but actually he was speaking to himself.

"A woman! A *person!*" he hissed. "They think I don't know about the animals, but I do! All the kids know! Only now, it's a *person!* A woman. And next time . . ."

Next time? Oh, no . . .

"What if next time it's one of *us?* You...or Mom?"



In the morning, Joey went back to the library. And this time, he knew what information he sought. And he found it.

On his way to the cemetery, he stopped for 'Liss. She was playing hopscotch with a group of friends. She did not want to go. But Joey insisted.

"I'm going to need you!" he said. "I can't do it alone . . ."

The cemetery was not quite so scary in the daylight. But even so, 'Liss hung back. Especially when Joey stopped before the mausoleum where they'd seen the vampire drag his coffin.

"Don't worry," Joey said, his voice cracking a little. "He can't hurt us. Not now. He's got to sleep in the daytime. In his own coffin, on earth from the place where he was buried. It said so in the book!"

Near the mausoleum, there was an oak tree. Joey shinnied up into it, and with his pocket knife, cut and hacked until he had lopped off two short thick lengths of branch.

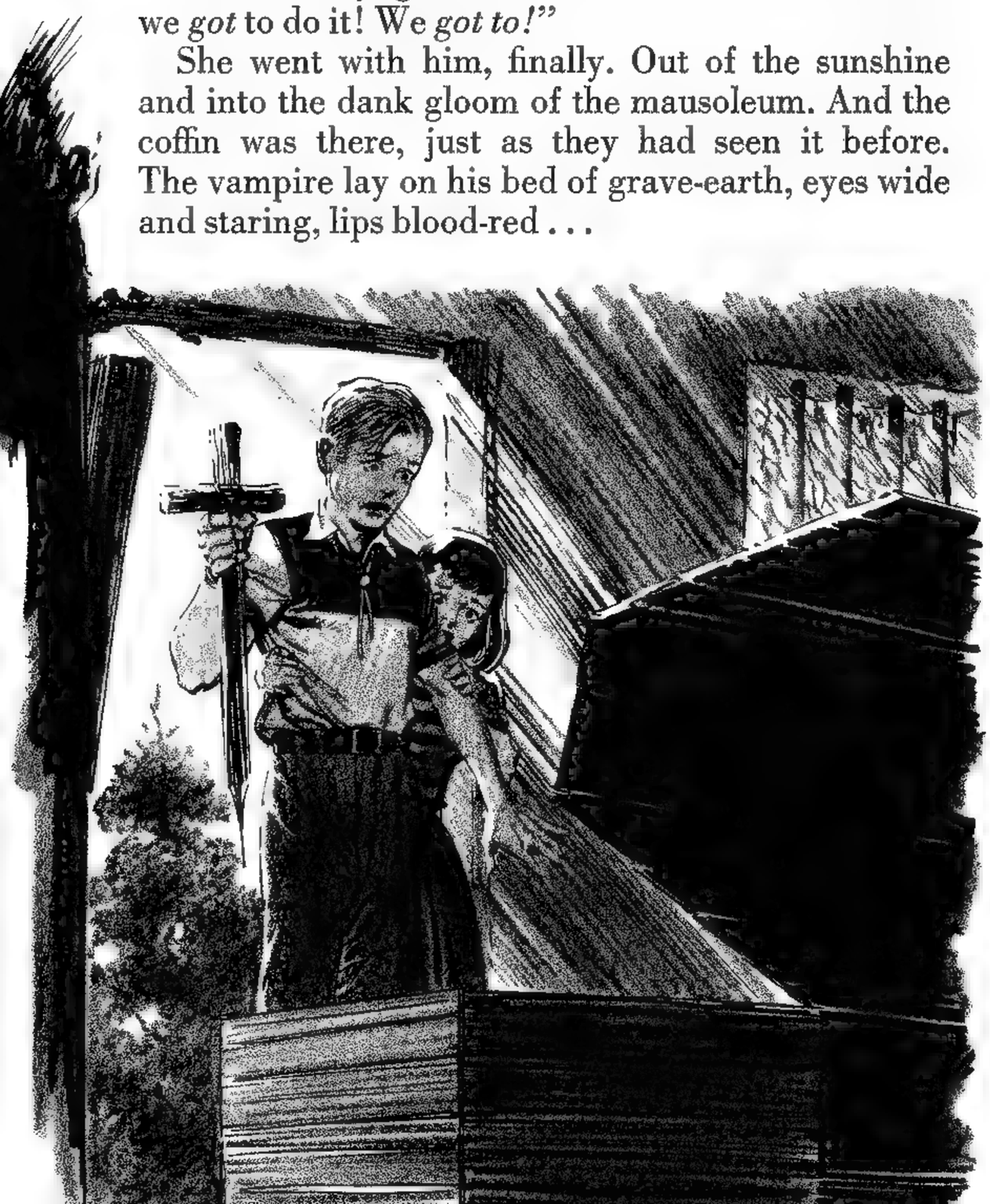
These, he afterward tied into a crude cross with some twine he had brought along for the purpose.

The lower end of the cross he whittled down to a needle-sharp point. The directions in the book he'd found at the library had been most explicit.

When he found a stone big enough and heavy enough to use as a hammer, he was ready. He had to explain to 'Liss then. She would have to hold the cross just so, while he struck it with the stone . . .

"Don't cry, 'Liss! He can't hurt us! Not while there's still daylight!" He tried to comfort her. "And we *got* to do it! We *got to!*"

She went with him, finally. Out of the sunshine and into the dank gloom of the mausoleum. And the coffin was there, just as they had seen it before. The vampire lay on his bed of grave-earth, eyes wide and staring, lips blood-red . . .



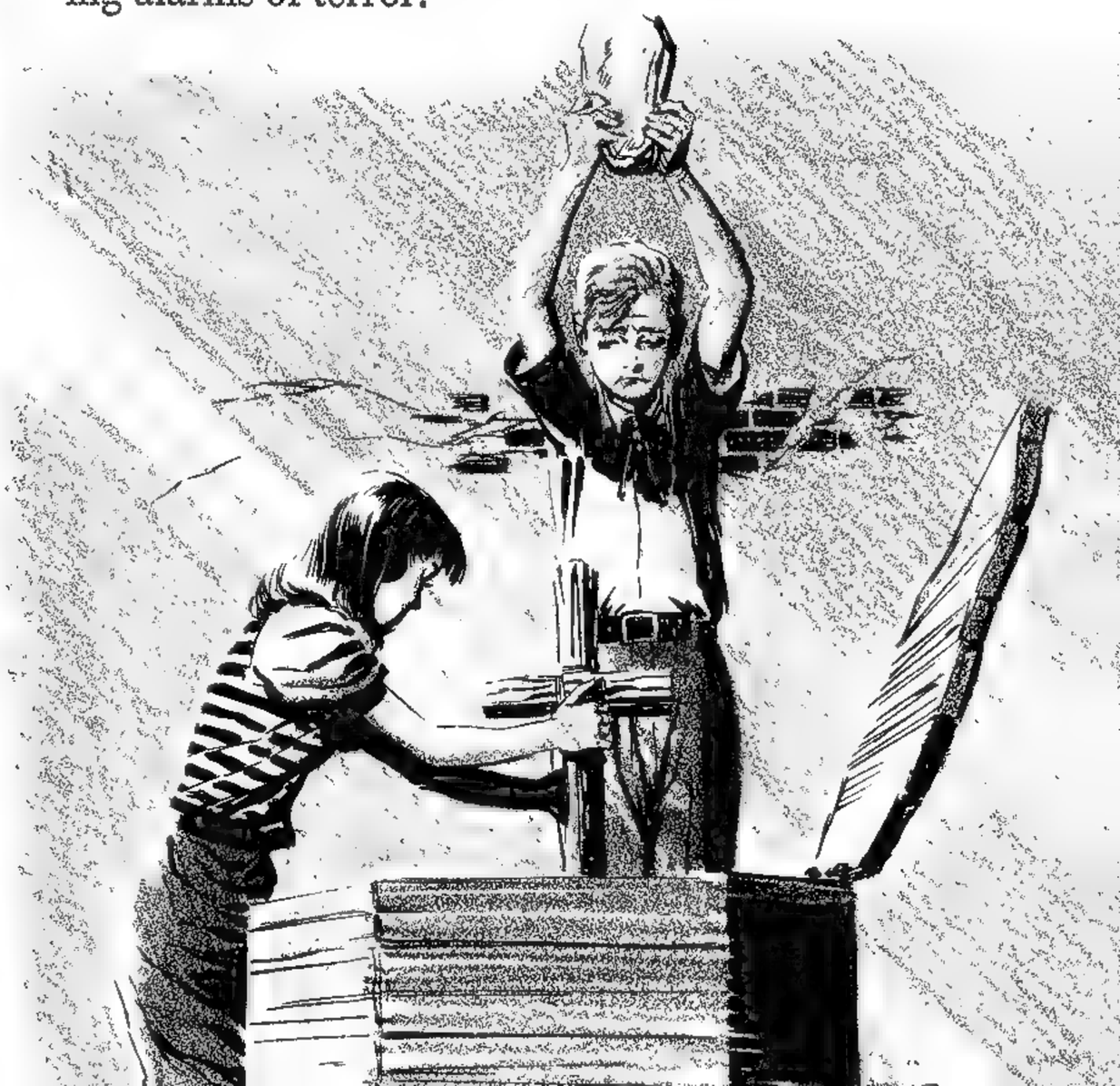
Joey's face was a small white mask of terror. But he did not falter.

"There," he said, placing the crude cross. "Hold it there. Just like that . . ."

'Liss's small hands held the cross so that its sharpened base rested just over the thing's heart. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Desolation and horror etched a grimace of pain across her tiny doll-face. This part, she could understand. Joey had explained.

Still . . .

But Joey was crying too, now, as he raised the stone. Every nerve-end in him was quivering, shrieking alarms of terror.



Inside him, it seemed that his heart must surely burst. And yet, he raised the stone, and drove it downward . . . again and again . . .

The sharpened end of the cross bit through finally, drove into the rotting planking of the coffin below . . .

Joey would remember afterward. Forever. He would remember the scream that burst from those dead-alive lips. He would remember how flesh rotted suddenly, and fell away, revealing white bone beneath . . . and how the bones, too, fell into dust before his eyes. Those things he would remember, and 'Liss would remember . . . forever.

And then, for the third time, they were running, running . . . running . . .

In her room later, Joey held 'Liss and stroked her hair, and told her that it was all right. He held her and whispered and talked and stroked until some of the horror receded, and her tears dried.

And then they went downstairs to wait with their mother for their father.

It was late, and he should have been home by then. The children watched their mother at the window, peering anxiously out. But it was no use.

Their father was not going to come home. Joey and 'Liss knew.

Not ever.

THE END

THE LONG WAIT

The tropic night hung over the island like a thick mildewed blanket, hot and wet and oppressive. From out across the dark Pacific, a faint breeze stirred, moved lazily inshore, rustled quietly through the towering cocoanut palms, and died away.

The plantation house lay silent beneath the starry sky.

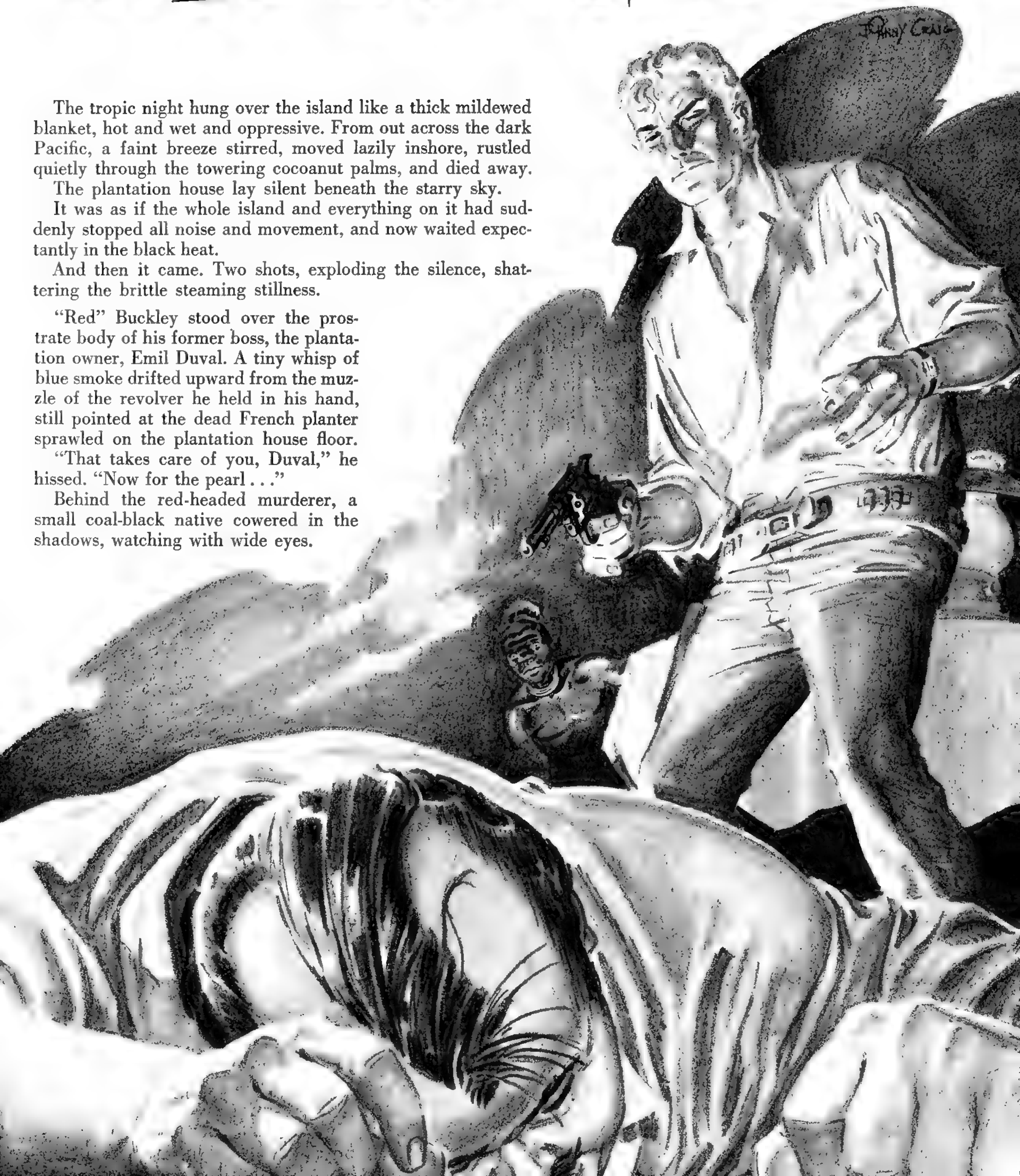
It was as if the whole island and everything on it had suddenly stopped all noise and movement, and now waited expectantly in the black heat.

And then it came. Two shots, exploding the silence, shattering the brittle steaming stillness.

"Red" Buckley stood over the prostrate body of his former boss, the plantation owner, Emil Duval. A tiny whisp of blue smoke drifted upward from the muzzle of the revolver he held in his hand, still pointed at the dead French planter sprawled on the plantation house floor.

"That takes care of you, Duval," he hissed. "Now for the pearl . . ."

Behind the red-headed murderer, a small coal-black native cowered in the shadows, watching with wide eyes.



Buckley shot a quick glance at the native and stepped over Duval's body, now staining the floor with a spreading crimson pool. He moved across the room to a small painting hung on the plantation house wall.

"Four years!" he whispered aloud. "Four years I've waited!"

He pushed the painting aside, stared at the sturdy wall safe behind it.

"Four years . . . and now it's mine!"

He spun the safe dial nervously.

"What are you frightened about, Kulu?" Buckley laughed at the cringing black man. "Duval is dead! Stop hiding like a scared monkey! Come out of there! Here! Look at it! My black pearl!"

Tumblers clicked and fell into place. The safe door swung open. Red clawed into the yawning hole.

The light from the overhead kerosene lamp danced over the gleaming surface of the smooth black sphere he held up.

"Finally . . ." he giggled, "the black pearl is mine!" He turned to the native. "Look at it, Kulu! Look at it! There is no pearl in the whole world like this one!"

The cowering native stared at the pearl from his hiding place in the shadows.

The native shuffled forward, out into the flickering lamplight, the whites of his eyes flashing brightly. He studied the black sphere that Red held between his fingers for a long moment. Then he turned with a grunt.

"Come, Missah Buckley," he whispered. "We go now. Boat ready. You finished. We go. Hurry, hurry!"

"Yeah, Kulu," Red looked around. "We go now. My business here *is* finished!" He spat at the dead planter and followed the native out of the door.

The two figures moved silently below the towering palms, down to the beach, white in the moonlight, where a native outrigger canoe was pulled up onto the sand.

"Got enough food and water, Kulu?" Red asked the lithe form ahead of him.

"Yessah, Missah Buckley! Got plenty . . ." Kulu answered.

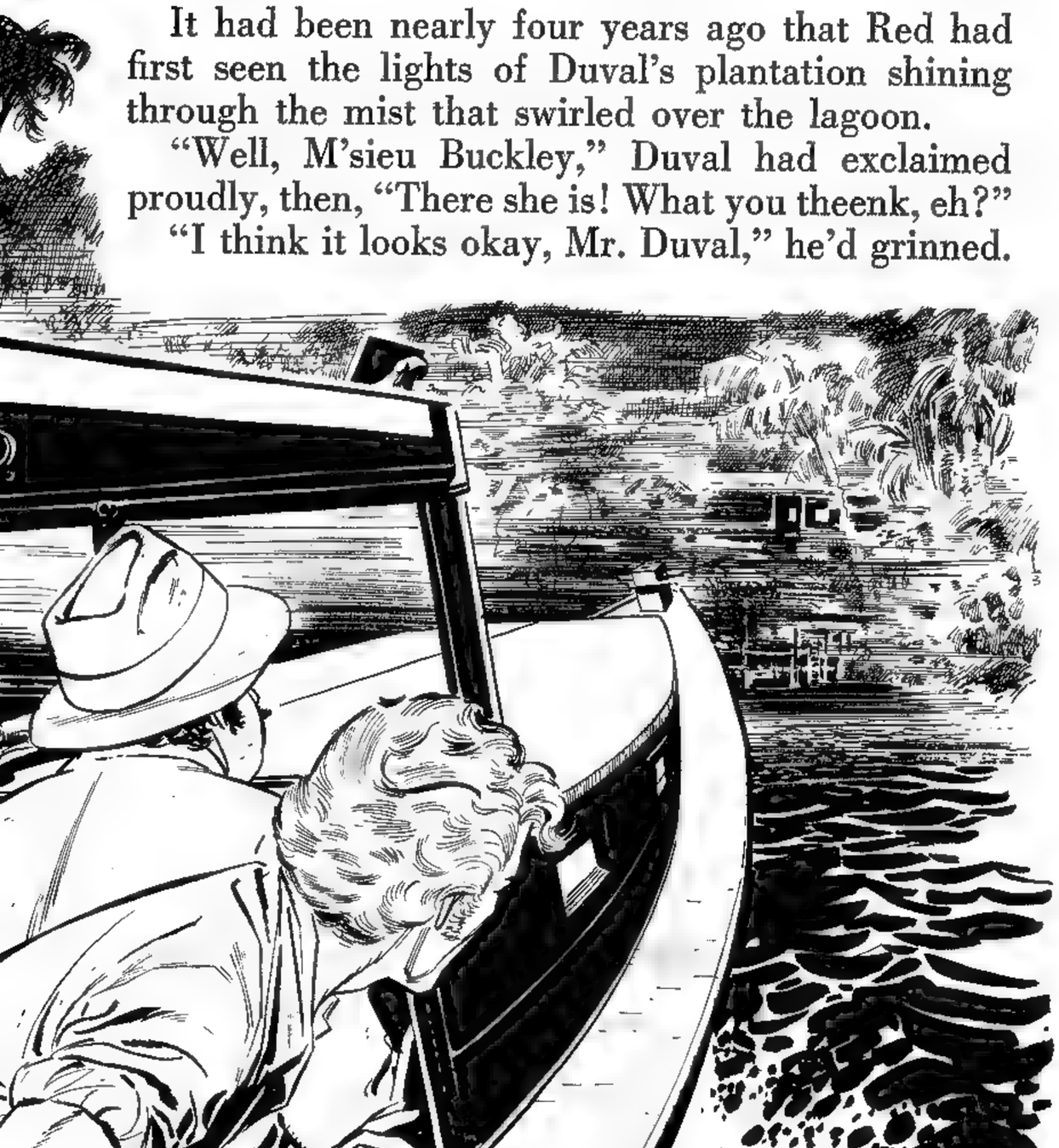
As the outrigger skimmed over the swells of the incoming breakers, moving out toward the open sea, Red turned, turned and watched the flickering lights of the plantation house fade into the night.

* * * * * * * *

It had been nearly four years ago that Red had first seen the lights of Duval's plantation shining through the mist that swirled over the lagoon.

"Well, M'sieu Buckley," Duval had exclaimed proudly, then, "There she is! What you theenk, eh?"

"I think it looks okay, Mr. Duval," he'd grinned.



Buckley climbed into the outrigger, and Kulu shoved off into the gently oncoming surf.

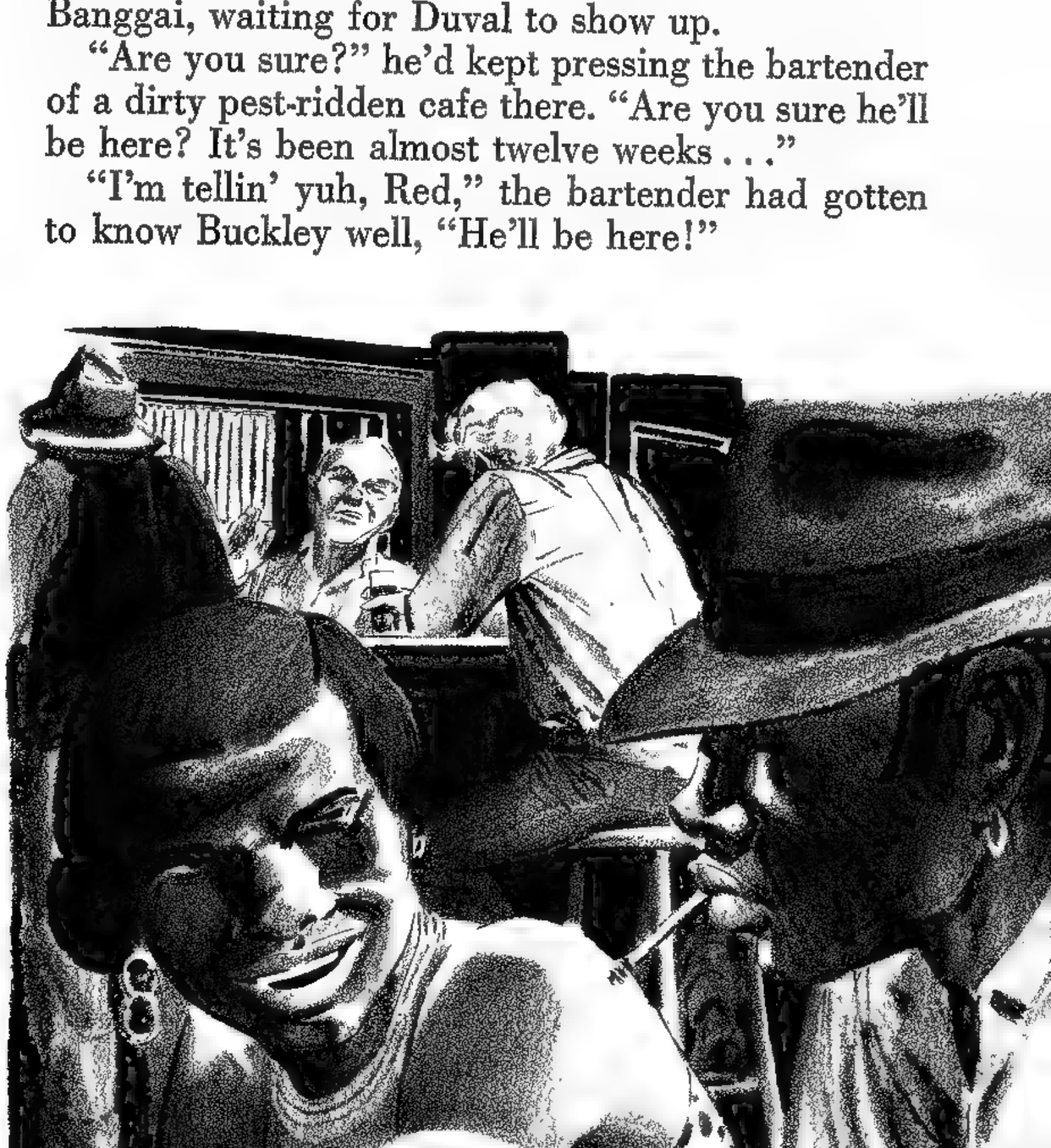
"Well, Kulu," Buckley chuckled. "In three days, we'll be in Banggai, and I'll be catchin' that steamer back to the States, eh?"

"Three days. Yessah, Missah Buckley," Kulu smiled.

He'd tried hard to hide the eagerness he'd felt, the excitement and the anticipation. For he'd worked hard and long for that moment. He'd spent almost a year tracing the fabulous black pearl to the French planter. He'd spent three interminable months in Banggai, waiting for Duval to show up.

"Are you sure?" he'd kept pressing the bartender of a dirty pest-ridden cafe there. "Are you sure he'll be here? It's been almost twelve weeks . . ."

"I'm tellin' yuh, Red," the bartender had gotten to know Buckley well, "He'll be here!"



"Duval comes down here from his island regularly. To buy provisions," the bartender had assured him. "And when he does, he always stops in here. So take it easy. He'll be in . . . eventually . . ."

The bartender'd been right. Duval had finally showed up, and Red had lost no time in approaching the jovial Frenchman and introducing himself.

"Zo, M'sieu Buckley," Duval had looked him over. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for a job, Mr. Duval." Red had announced. "I'll do anything . . ."

"A job? You want me to give you a job?" Duval had been thrilled at the idea of having another white man on the island with him, but he'd been cautious. He'd questioned Buckley. And Red had given him all the right answers.

"Chess, Duval? My favorite game!" he'd lied. "If I must say so myself, I'm quite an expert!"

"Then you are hired, M'sieu Buckley," Duval had boomed. "If for no other reason than I can now play chess with a live opponent instead of an imaginary one!"

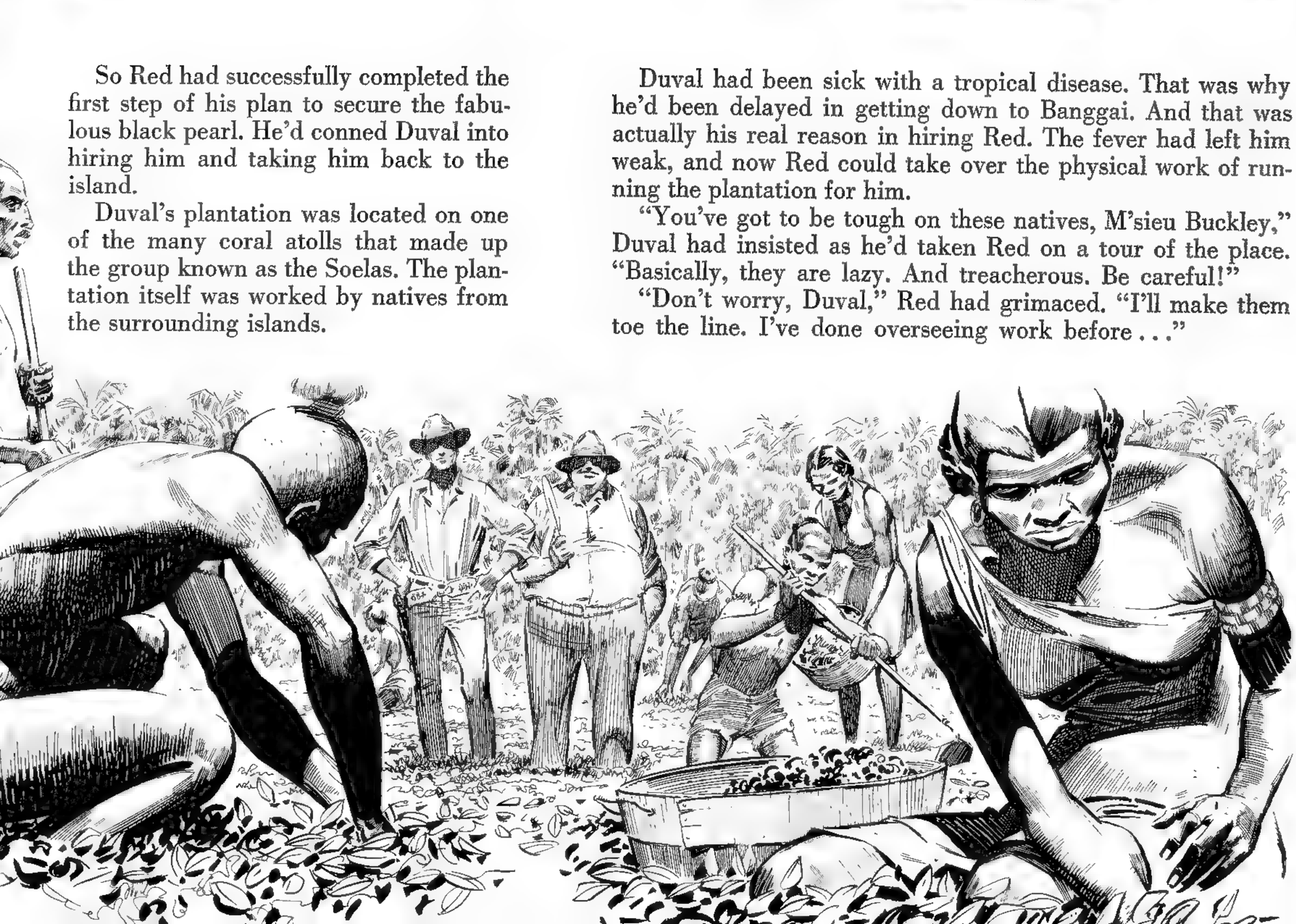
So Red had successfully completed the first step of his plan to secure the fabulous black pearl. He'd conned Duval into hiring him and taking him back to the island.

Duval's plantation was located on one of the many coral atolls that made up the group known as the Soelas. The plantation itself was worked by natives from the surrounding islands.

Duval had been sick with a tropical disease. That was why he'd been delayed in getting down to Banggai. And that was actually his real reason in hiring Red. The fever had left him weak, and now Red could take over the physical work of running the plantation for him.

"You've got to be tough on these natives, M'sieu Buckley," Duval had insisted as he'd taken Red on a tour of the place. "Basically, they are lazy. And treacherous. Be careful!"

"Don't worry, Duval," Red had grimaced. "I'll make them toe the line. I've done overseeing work before . . ."



So it had begun. The long wait. Red had been convinced that Duval owned the black pearl, but he'd had no way of knowing where the fat Frenchman kept it hidden. He would have to find out. And that would take time.

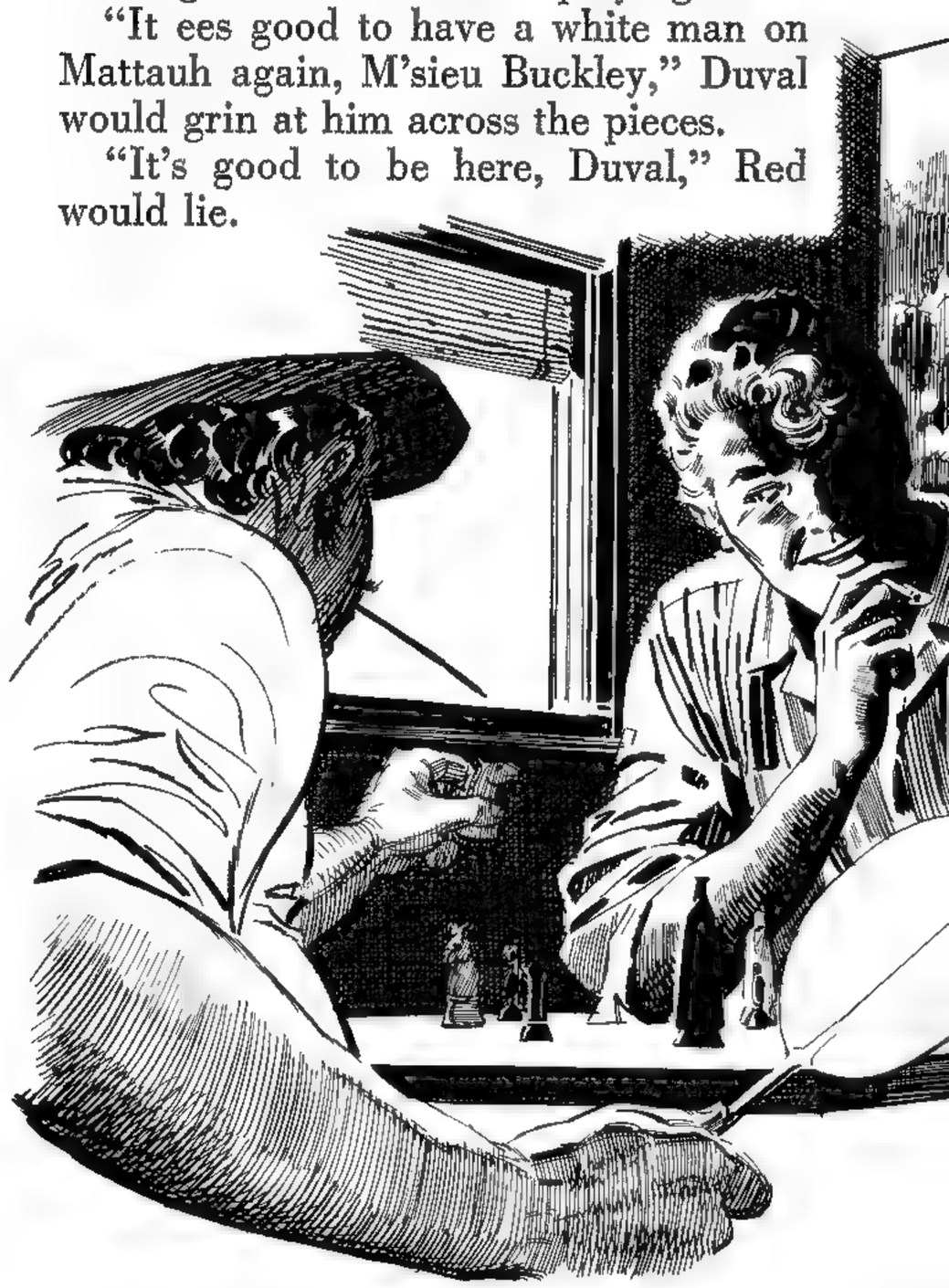
And the time had crept by. Slowly. Unbearably.

There had been those unbearable days under the hot tropic sun, overseeing the plantation.

And there had been those unbearable evenings on the veranda . . . playing chess.

"It ees good to have a white man on Mattauh again, M'sieu Buckley," Duval would grin at him across the pieces.

"It's good to be here, Duval," Red would lie.



In the long months that followed, Buckley and Duval had become quite friendly. They'd discussed everything and anything over their nightly chess games. Finally, one night, Red cleverly worked the conversation around to the subject of precious gems.

"Give me a ruby anytime, Duval," he'd smiled. "That's a real beauty."

"Perhaps you are partial to red because of your flaming hair, M'sieu," Duval had answered.

"Perhaps," Red had shrugged and run his hand through his crimson crop.

"No, M'sieu," Duval had gone on, "you have not seen real beauty until you have seen a black pearl!"

"A black Pearl!?" Red had tried hard to act surprised. "Have you ever seen a black pearl, Duval?"

"Oui, M'sieu," Duval had smiled mysteriously. "Yes, I have seen a black pearl."

Buckley had tried to pump Duval further about the pearl, but the Frenchman had been elusive. That he'd seen one was as far as he would go. He'd clammed up after that.

And so the first year on Mattauh had passed.

One night, Buckley'd heard a sound outside his hut. He'd snatched his revolver and stepped out onto the veranda.

"Who's out there?" he'd snarled into the steaming night. "Come out of those bushes or I shoot!"

"No shoot, Missah! No shoot . . ." had been the answer.

That had been Kulu. He'd edged out of the underbrush into the light cast through the bungalow door, bowing again and again.

"What were you doing out there?" Red had snapped. "What were you nosing around for?"

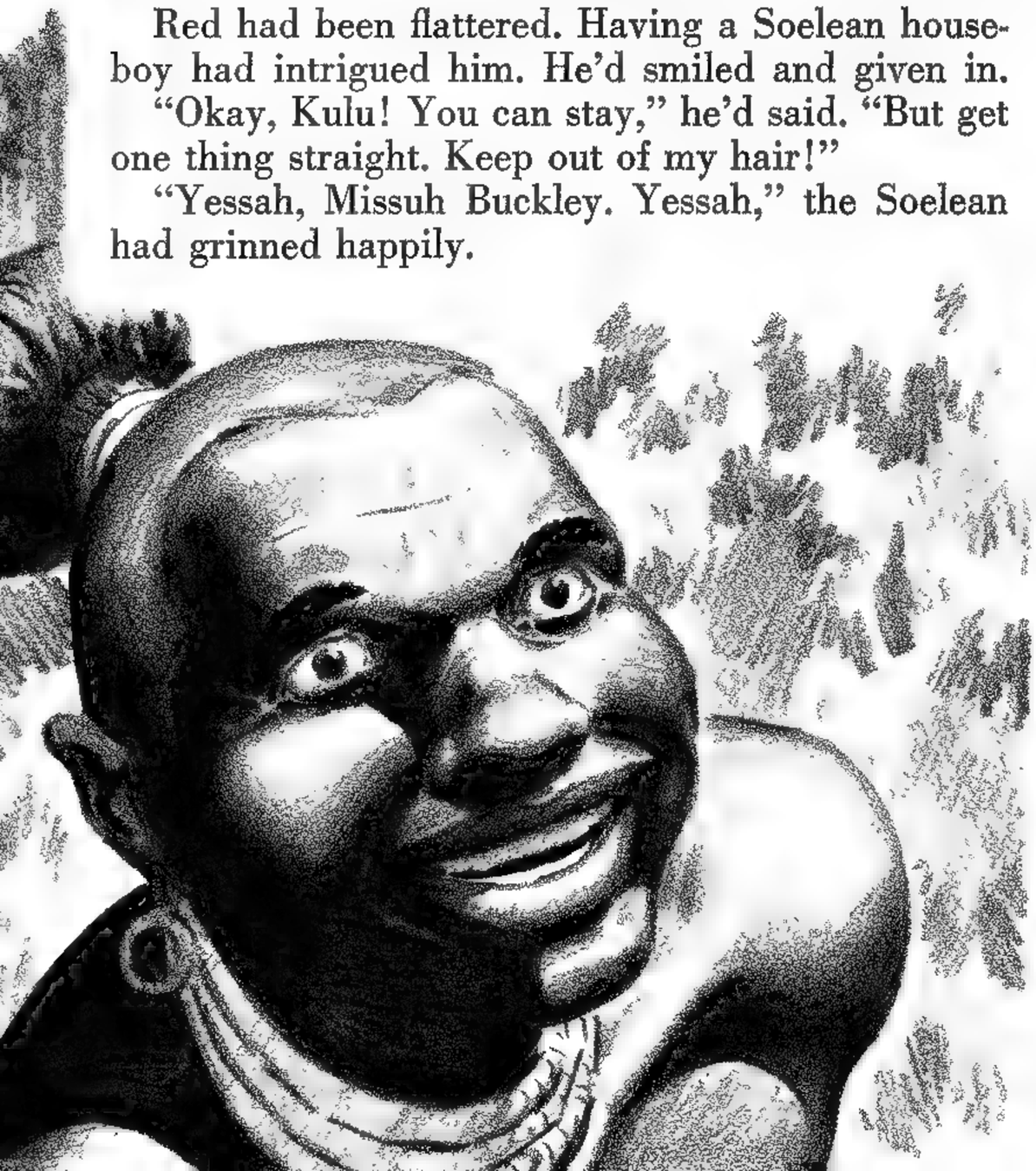
"Mean no harm, Missah." Kulu had stammered. "Mean no harm. Kulu wanna be house-boy. Kulu wanna be servant. Kulu wanna work for Missah Buckley . . ."

Kulu had pleaded with Red to let him stay. He'd seen him from afar and admired him. He'd wanted no pay. Only what morsels of food the overseer would throw him. He'd wanted but to serve him.

Red had been flattered. Having a Soelean house-boy had intrigued him. He'd smiled and given in.

"Okay, Kulu! You can stay," he'd said. "But get one thing straight. Keep out of my hair!"

"Yessah, Missuh Buckley. Yessah," the Soelean had grinned happily.



And so Kulu had come to work for Buckley, and had made his life that much easier during the next two years. He'd scrubbed the overseer's clothes, kept the bungalow spic and span, and generally catered to his red-headed master's every need.

And meanwhile, Red had spent those two years working himself into Duval's confidence. Until finally, one night, the Frenchman had given out.

"You asked me once eef I ever saw a black pearl, M'sieu," he'd said as he'd poured himself a glass of wine. Remembair?"

"Yeah, Duval," Buckley'd tried not to show his eagerness. "I remember."

"Well, M'sieu," Duval had sipped his wine and squinted at his companion. "I have not only *seen* one . . . I *own* one!"

"That so?" Red's heart had raced wildly in his chest. "You do? Where? Le'see . . ."

"Behind that painting is a safe," the fat planter had gone on, "built into the wall. That is where I keep my black pearl!"

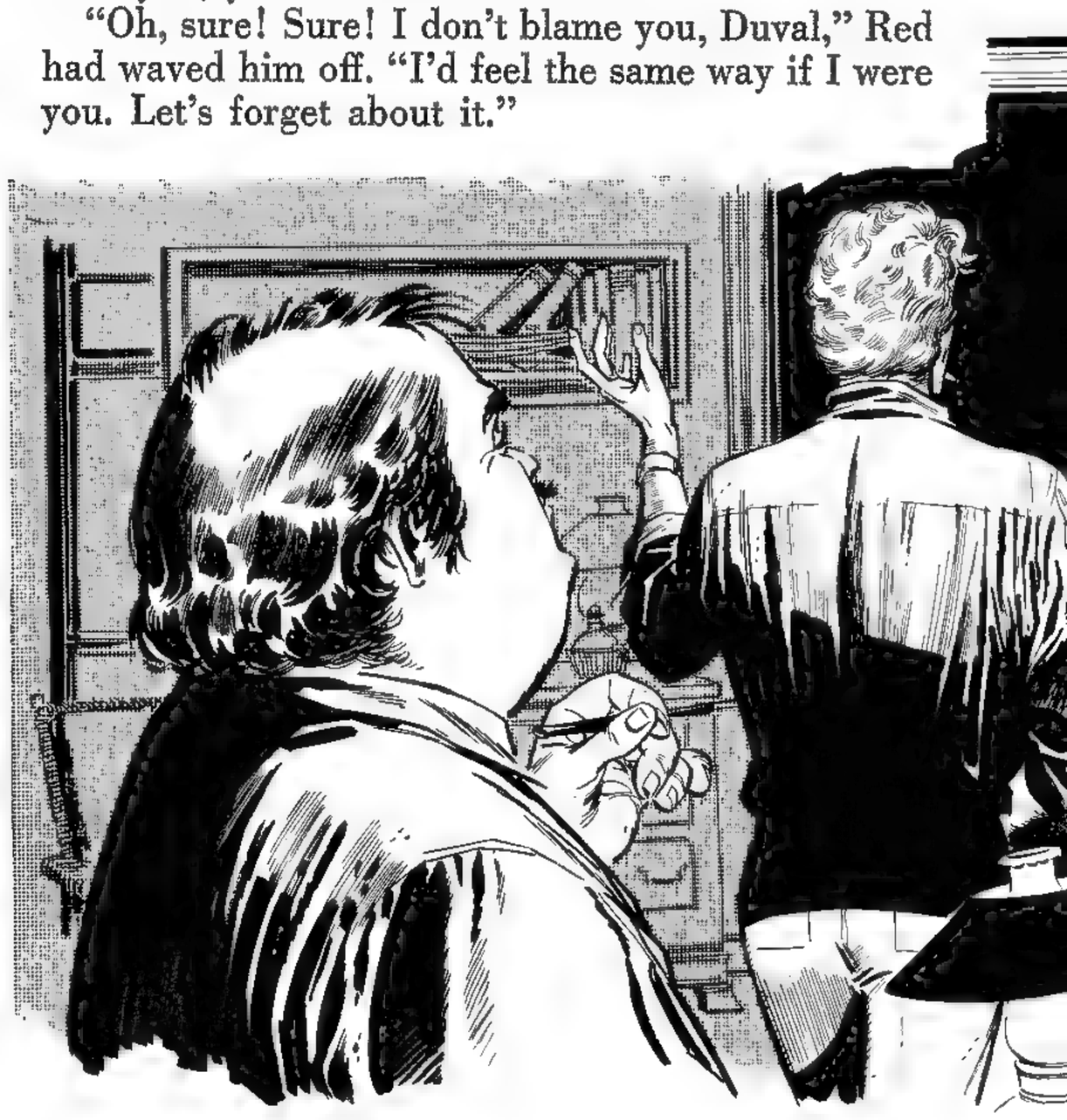
"No kidding!" Red had smiled. Then, veiling his desperation, he'd added: "A black pearl, eh? Gee, I'd really like to see one! How about it, Duval?"

"No, no, M'sieu," Duval had laughed. "Temptation is a great evil . . ."

"Tell you what, Duval . . ." Red's mind had raced.

"Oh, no, M'sieu!" Duval had smiled and shaken his head. "The pearl is worth a fortune! And we are two men on this island alone! It would be foolish for me to tell you where I keep it! Not that I do not trust you, you understand . . ."

"Oh, sure! Sure! I don't blame you, Duval," Red had waved him off. "I'd feel the same way if I were you. Let's forget about it."



Buckley had cut the conversation short because he had not wanted to arouse the Frenchman's suspicions. And the waiting had gone on.

He'd found out for certain, now, that Duval had the pearl. But it was only after another torturous year had gone by that Red had learned exactly where he'd kept the gem.

"See that painting there . . . on the wall?" Duval had asked him one evening.

"Yeah?" Red had not known what was coming.

"If it'll make you feel any better, you can hold a gun on me all the while! That way, I wouldn't dare try anything! Not that I would anyway! It's just that you've aroused my curiosity, and I've never seen a black pearl. What do you say? Here's my revolver. It's loaded."

And he'd handed Duval his gun.

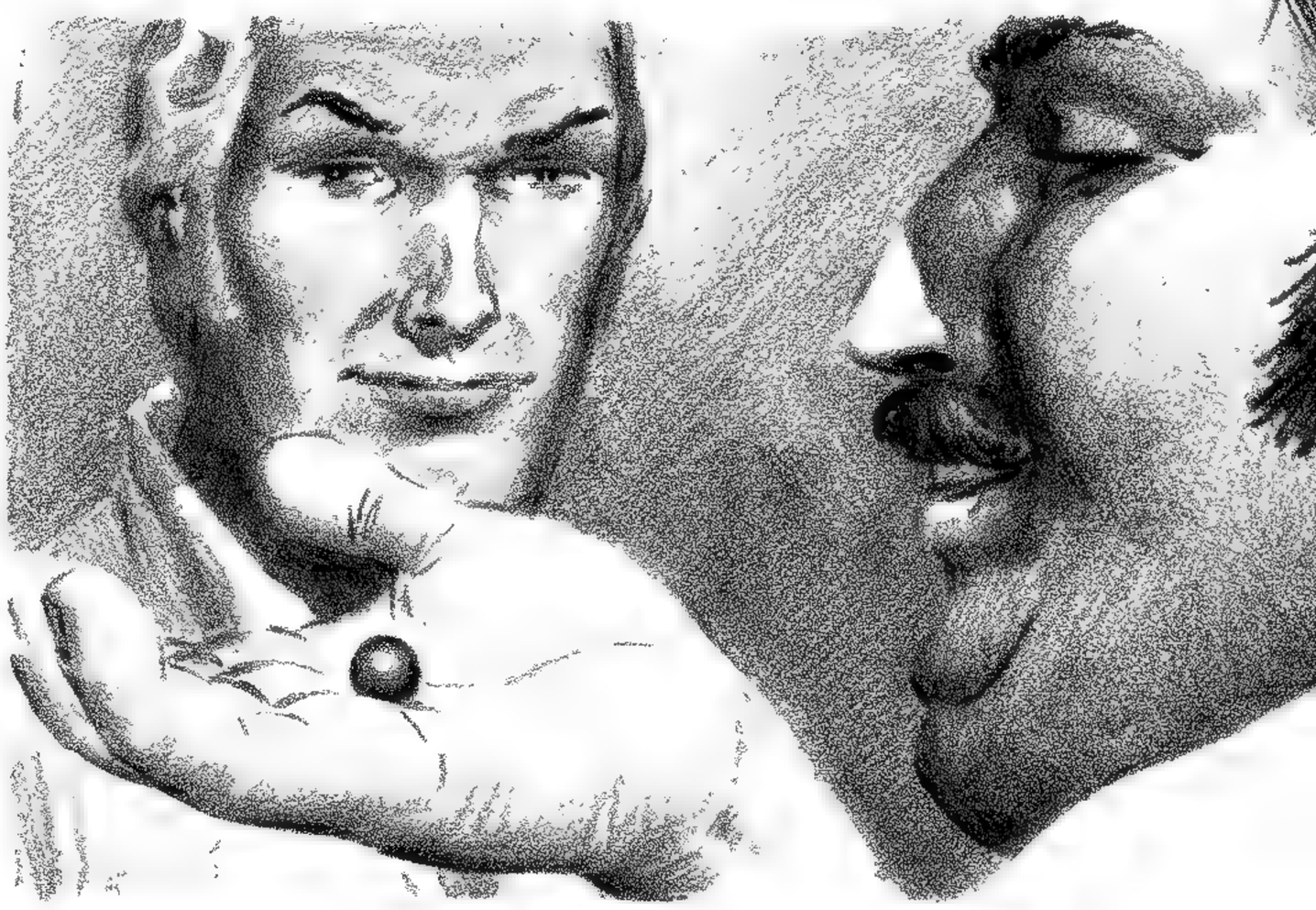
Duval had fallen for it. He'd taken the gun, raised his fat carcass from the chess table, and gone to the wall safe. And as Red had watched, he'd spun the dial back and forth until the small steel door had swung open.

"Here, M'sieu," he'd said, turning to face the red-headed overseer. "Here is *real* beauty . . ."

The tiny black sphere had gleamed bright in his fleshy palm.

"It . . . it *is* beautiful, Duval," Red had gasped. "Beautiful! It looks like it's worth a fortune!"

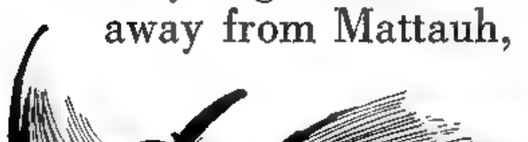
"A quarter of a million, at least!" Duval had whispered.



The long wait. The years of patient long waiting had been almost over then. Red had gotten the information he'd wanted. As Duval had opened the safe, he'd carefully noted and memorized its combination.

All that had been left then was to arrange for a getaway. And long before, he'd decided that Kulu would supply that.

"Tell me, Kulu," he questioned the native that very night. "What would I do if I wanted to get away from Mattauh, and get to Banggai?"



"Take Missah Duval's motor launch, Missah Buckley," Kulu grinned. "Tha's how he go alla time."

"No, Kulu," Red had smiled. "I mean if I wanted to get to Banggai *secretly* . . . without attracting any attention."

"I could mebbe take you there in native canoe, Missah Buckley," Kulu had looked at him wide-eyed. "Long trip. Mebbee three days. But I get you there."

"Thanks, Kulu. Thanks a lot. I appreciate your offer. Maybe I'll take you up on it," Red had said.

So everything had been worked out. To the last detail. Red had waited for the time that the annual steamer put in at Banggai. Then, four days before it was due, that very morning in fact, he'd gone to his native servant.

"Get that outrigger, Kulu!" he'd said. "We're going to need it . . . tonight . . ."

"Yessah, Missah Buckley," Kulu had nodded, as if he knew what was to come.

The Soelean remained silent, paddling mechanically, staring out over the vast expanse of moonlit water as his red-headed master raved on.

Buckley turned finally, and grinned at the native.

"I don't know why you hung around as long as you did, Kulu," he said. "I guess I treated you pretty rough sometimes. Tell you what! When we get to Banggai, I'll buy you something real nice! Okay?"

Kulu did not answer. His eyes flashed in the moonlight as they swept the horizon.

And now it was over. All over. All the waiting.

Red had his black pearl, and Kulu was paddling over the gently tossing South Pacific. Toward Banggai. Toward freedom.

The lights of Duval's plantation were gone now, lost in the mist that hangs over the tropic sea at night.

Buckley smiled and brought out the pearl, black gleaming in the moonlight.

"Look at it, Kulu," he whispered. "Look at it! Four years I waited! And now it's mine! There's no pearl in all the world like this one!"

Red studied him.

"S'matter, Kulu?" he asked. "You sore at me? You think maybe buying a little trinket isn't enough? You're a pretty smart boy, Kulu! Okay! Tell you what! When we get to Banggai, I'm gonna . . ."

Buckley's voice died. Kulu was smiling.

Buckley spun around. Dancing lights pinpointed the gloom.

"What the . . .?" he gasped.

And then, ever so faintly . . . but growing louder with each stroke of Kulu's paddle . . . the throb of drums drifted across the tossing black expanse.

"What's *that*, Kulu?" whispered Buckley.

There was no answer.

"Drums!" the red-head screamed. "Native drums! We're headed toward them! Kulu! Where the hell are you taking me?"

The gleaming steel blade sang downward with lightning speed, cutting short Buckley's blood-curdling scream.

The black pearl slipped from his fingers and dropped into the sea.

Kulu smiled down.

"I wait long time, too!" he whispered.

The island loomed up before them. The fires lit the beach, illuminating the gleaming dark-skinned dancing figures.

Buckley stared at them, then turned to face Kulu.

The machete in the native's hand reflected the glow of the distant fires as he raised it over his red-headed master.

"Kulu! My God! What are you going to do?" Buckley shrieked.

Later, the grinning natives on the fire-lit beach gathered around Kulu as he strutted among them, holding the head with the flaming shock of red hair high for all to see.

And as they stared and ogled at it in wonder and envy, Kulu exclaimed (in his native tongue):

"Four years I wait! And now it is mine! There is no head in all the Soelas like this one!"

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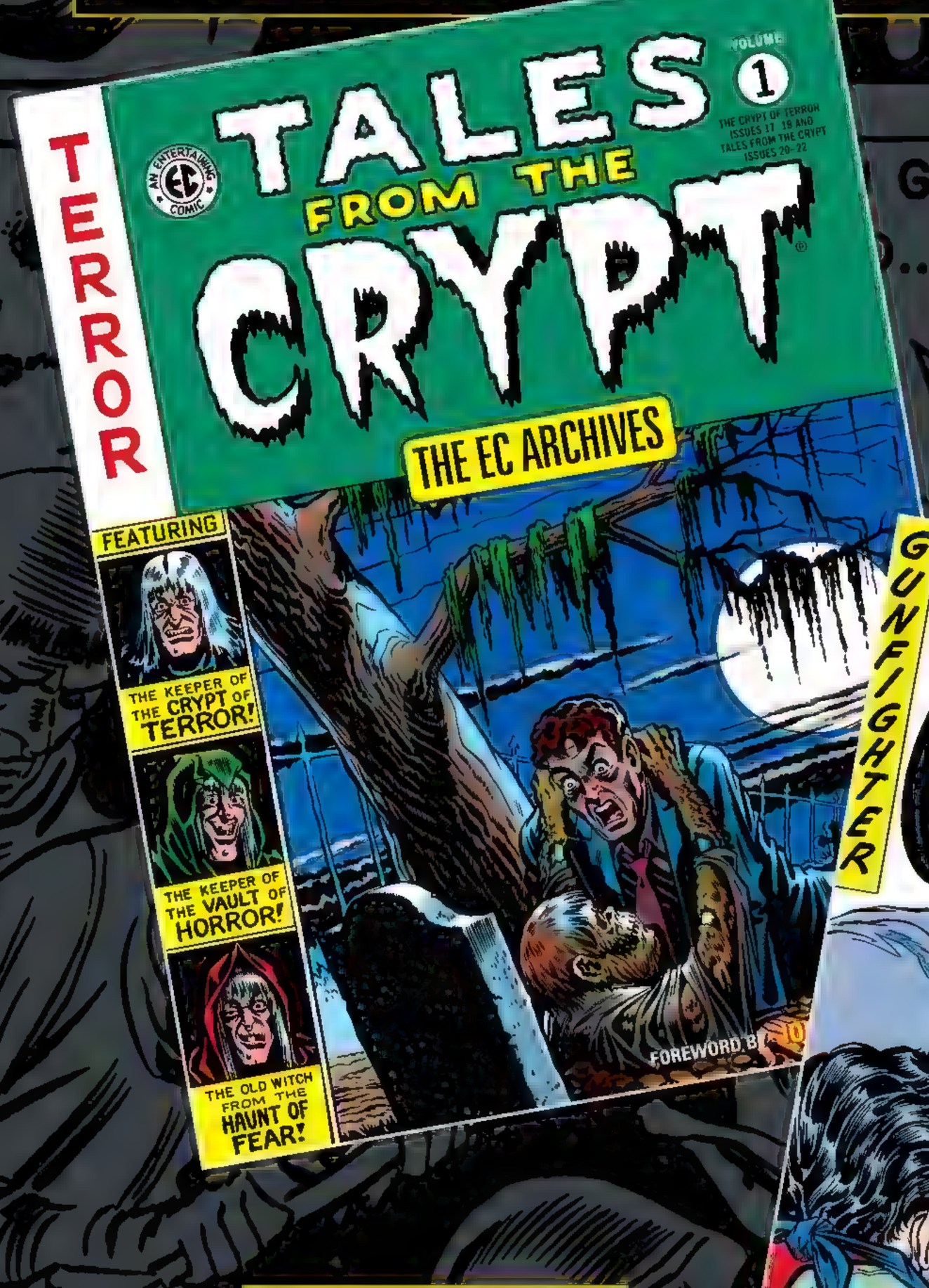
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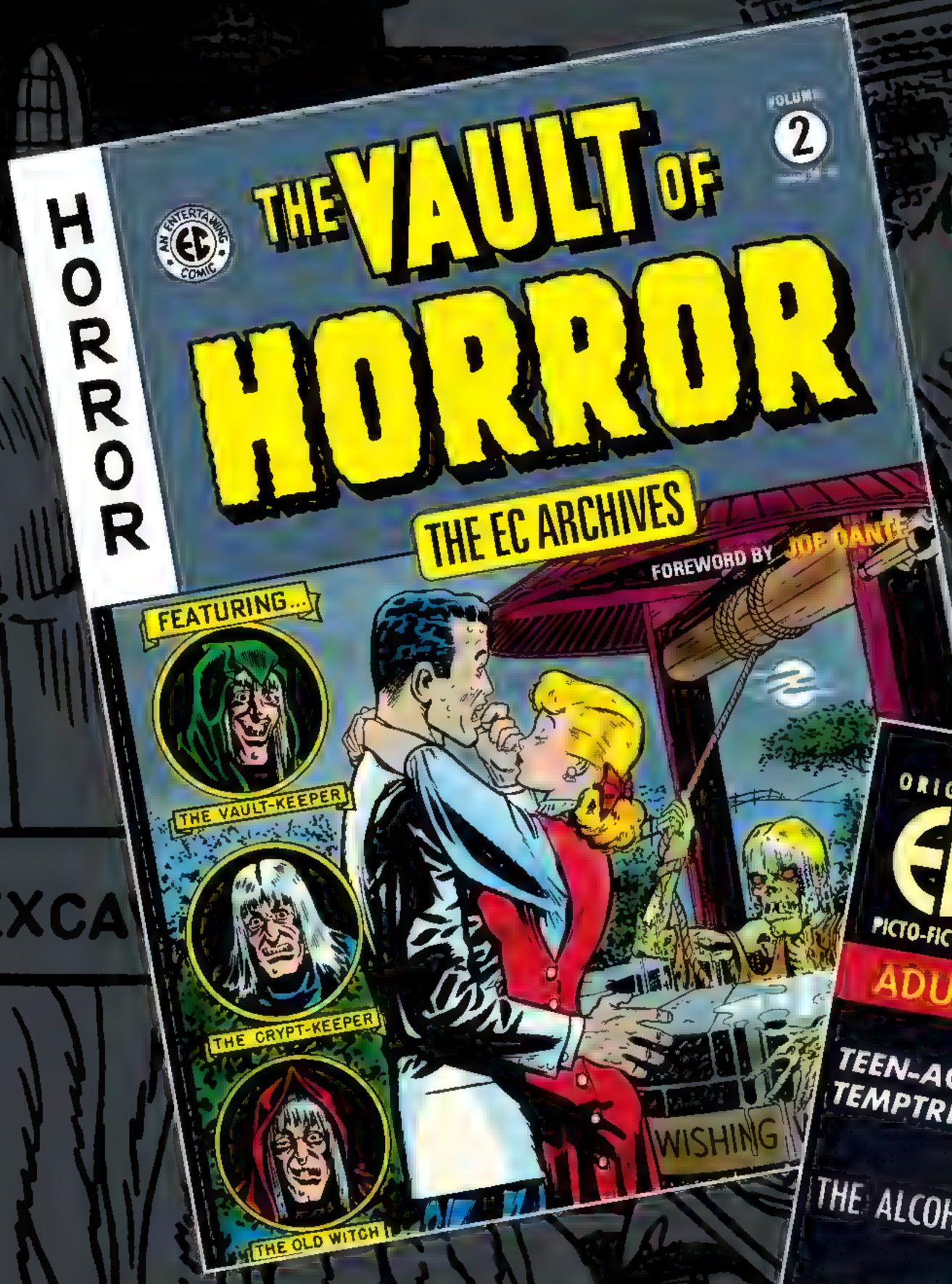

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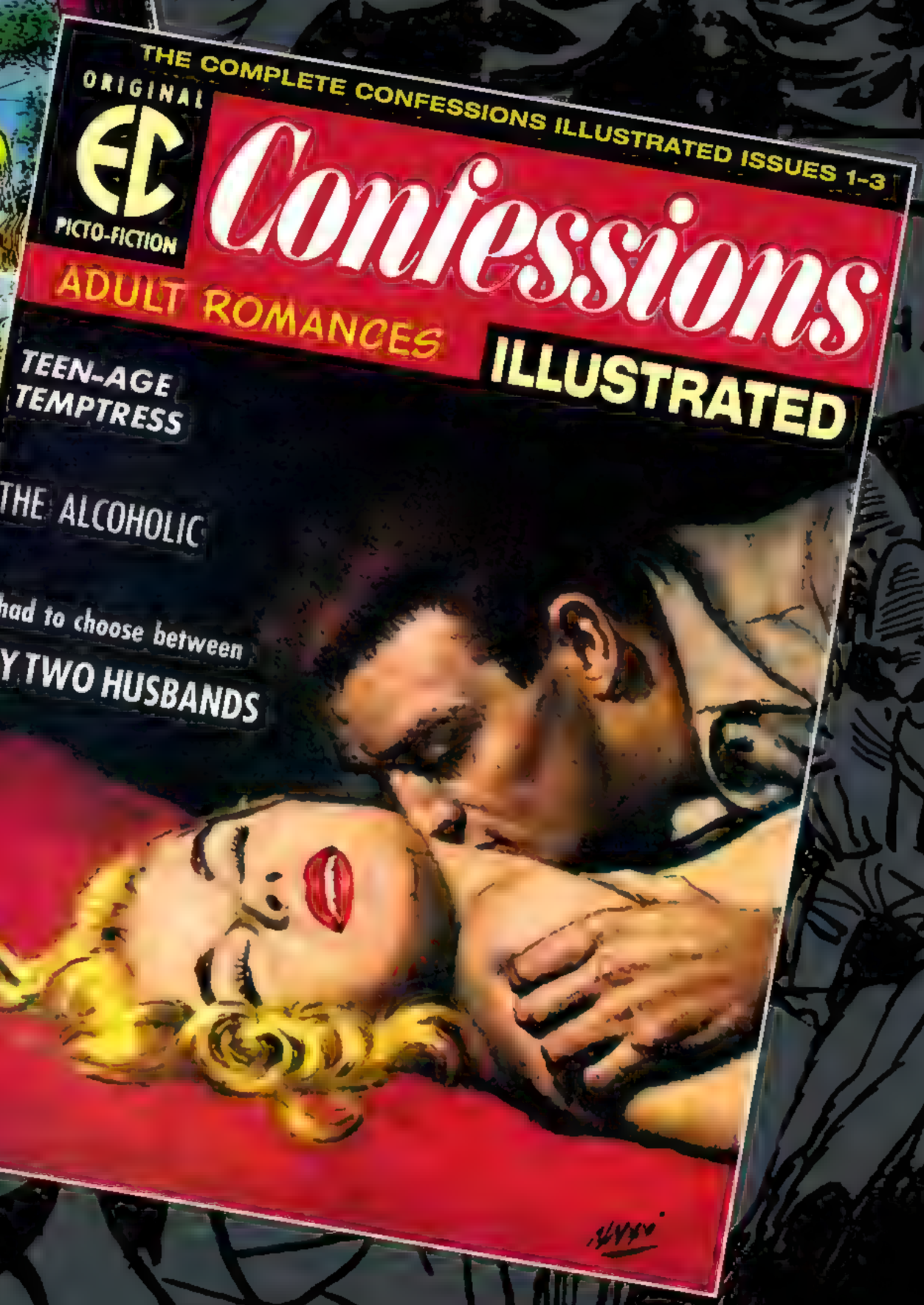

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DARK HORSE BOOKS

AN ENTERTAINING EC COMIC

Tales from the Crypt™ © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Gunfighter™ © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. Vault of Horror™ © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. *Confessions Illustrated*™ © William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc. The EC logo is a registered trademark of William M. Gaines, Agent, Inc., and used under license by Dark Horse Comic LLC.

THE GAINES FAMILY AND COMIC BOOKS

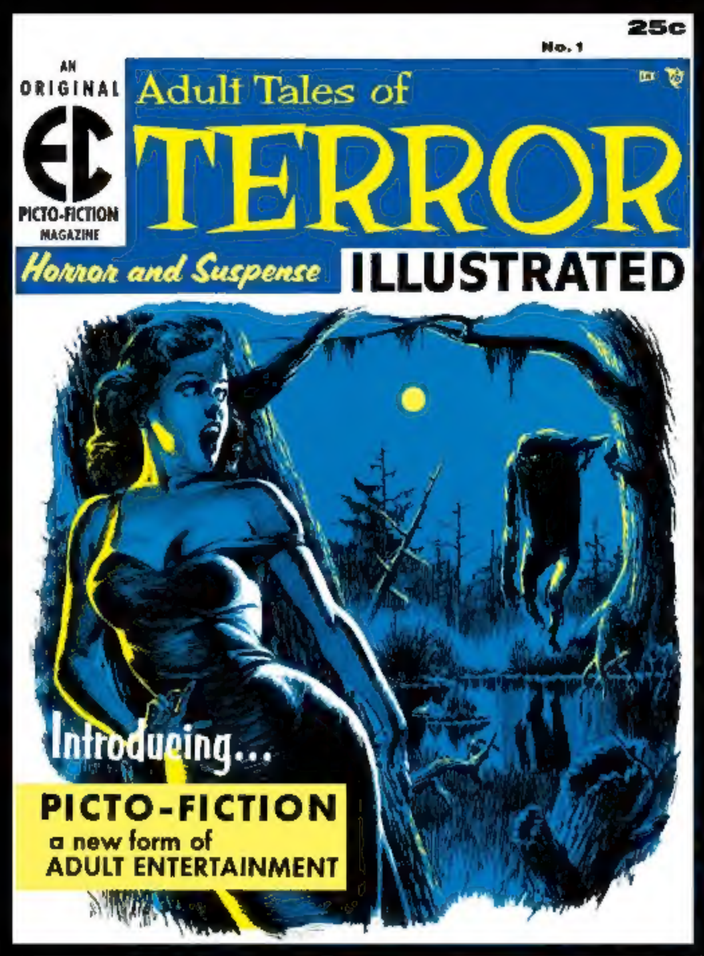
M. C. "CHARLIE" GAINES is generally regarded to be the father of the modern comic book. In 1933 he placed ten-cent stickers on comic books printed for advertising toothpaste and took them to newsstands in New York. When they sold out quickly, he knew he was onto something. He went on to become one of the most important publishers of comic books, founding Educational Comics, which later became Entertaining Comics. Charlie was killed in a boating accident in 1947.

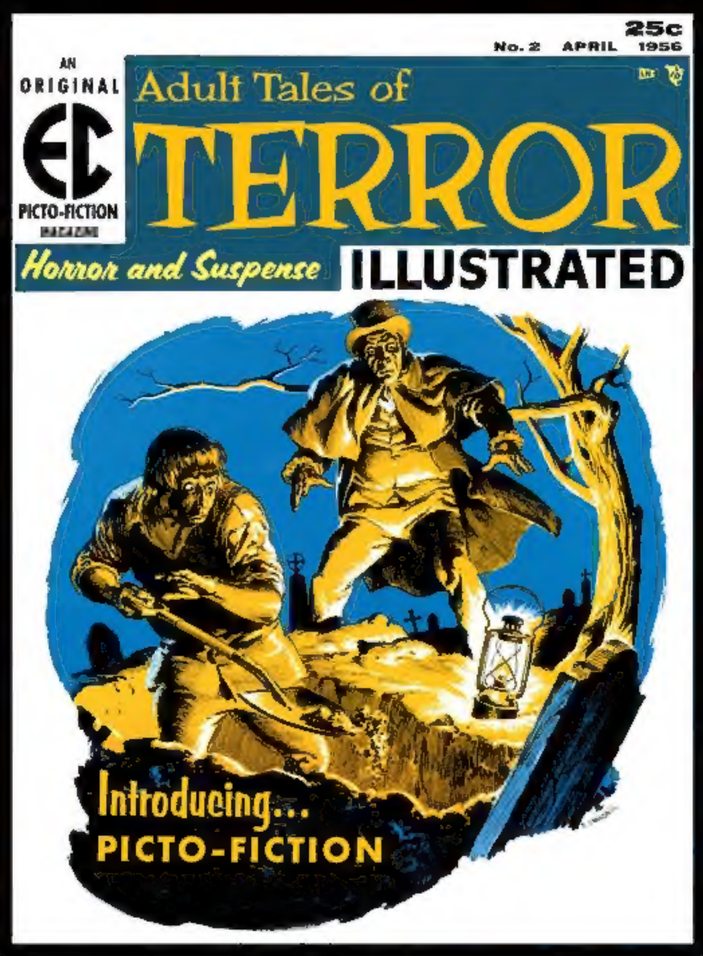
WILLIAM M. "BILL" GAINES was studying to be a chemistry teacher when his father, M. C. Gaines, died, forcing him suddenly into the business of publishing comic books. By 1950, Bill had ended all the titles previously published by Entertaining Comics and had created new titles like *Tales from the Crypt*, pioneering a new era in comic books featuring horror and science-fiction stories. These new titles were immediately bestsellers, leading to other publishers flooding the market with similar horror-themed comics.

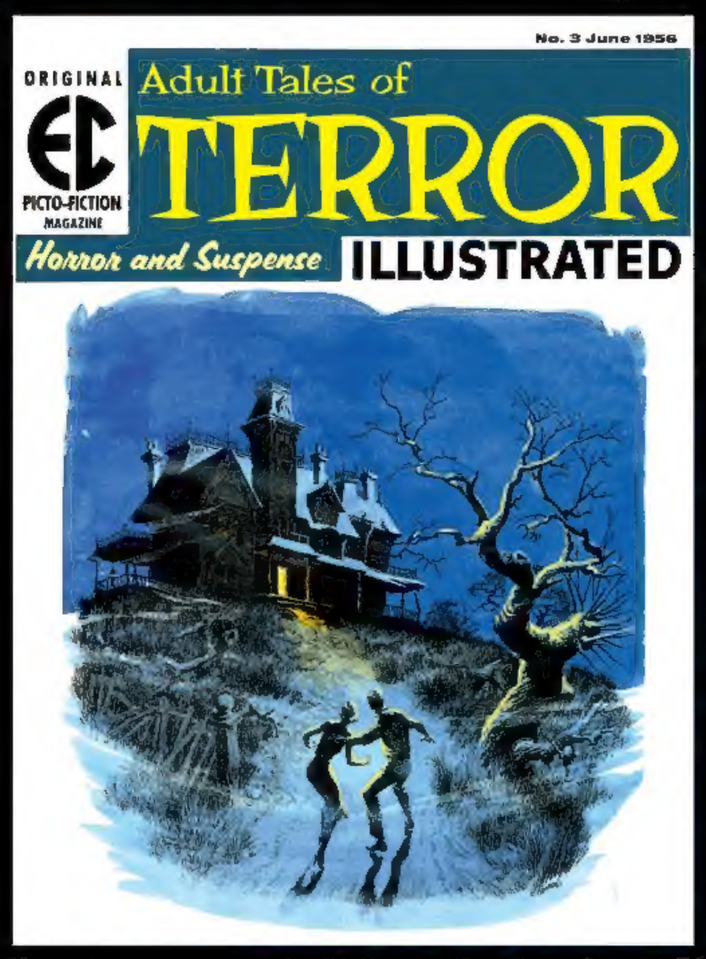
Along the way, always searching for a new trend in comic books, Bill published *MAD*, which started its long life as a ten-cent comic book. By 1955, the flood of horror comics and the belief that they were the cause of rising juvenile delinquency caused the comic book industry to adopt a self-imposed Comics Code, which, by forbidding the use of words like "horror" and "terror," put Bill Gaines out of business. His response was to fold his entire line of comic books and put all his efforts into *MAD*, which became a twenty-five-cent magazine.

As a magazine, *MAD* flourished as its circulation climbed into the millions. When Bill Gaines died in 1992, control of EC Comics passed on to his daughters, Cathy and Wendy. Bill's older daughter, Cathy Gaines Mifsud, now manages the company, with the assistance of her son Corey Mifsud, the fourth generation of the Gaines family to be involved in comic book publishing.

DARK HORSE COMICS was founded in 1986 by Mike Richardson as an offshoot of his Oregon comic book retail chain, Things From Another World. Richardson pursued the idea of establishing an ideal atmosphere for creative professionals, and more than thirty years later, the company has grown to become the third-largest comics publisher in the United States.







ENJOY THE COMPLETE RUN of *Terror Illustrated*, an innovative "Picto-Fiction" magazine containing illustrated prose stories of terror, murder, and more of society's supernatural secrets—featuring work by the classic crew of the EC bullpen: Al Feldstein, Jack Davis, Joe Orlando, Johnny Craig, and more!

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DARK HORSE BOOKS

AN ENTERTAINING EC COMIC

"THANKS TO DARK HORSE, WE ARE ABLE TO SEE THESE RARE AND UNIQUE EXPERIMENTS [. . .] IN A SHAPE AND FORM EVEN BETTER THAN THEIR ORIGINAL PUBLICATION."—MICK GARRIS